AFFECTIVE PUBLICS

Sentiment, Technology, and Politics

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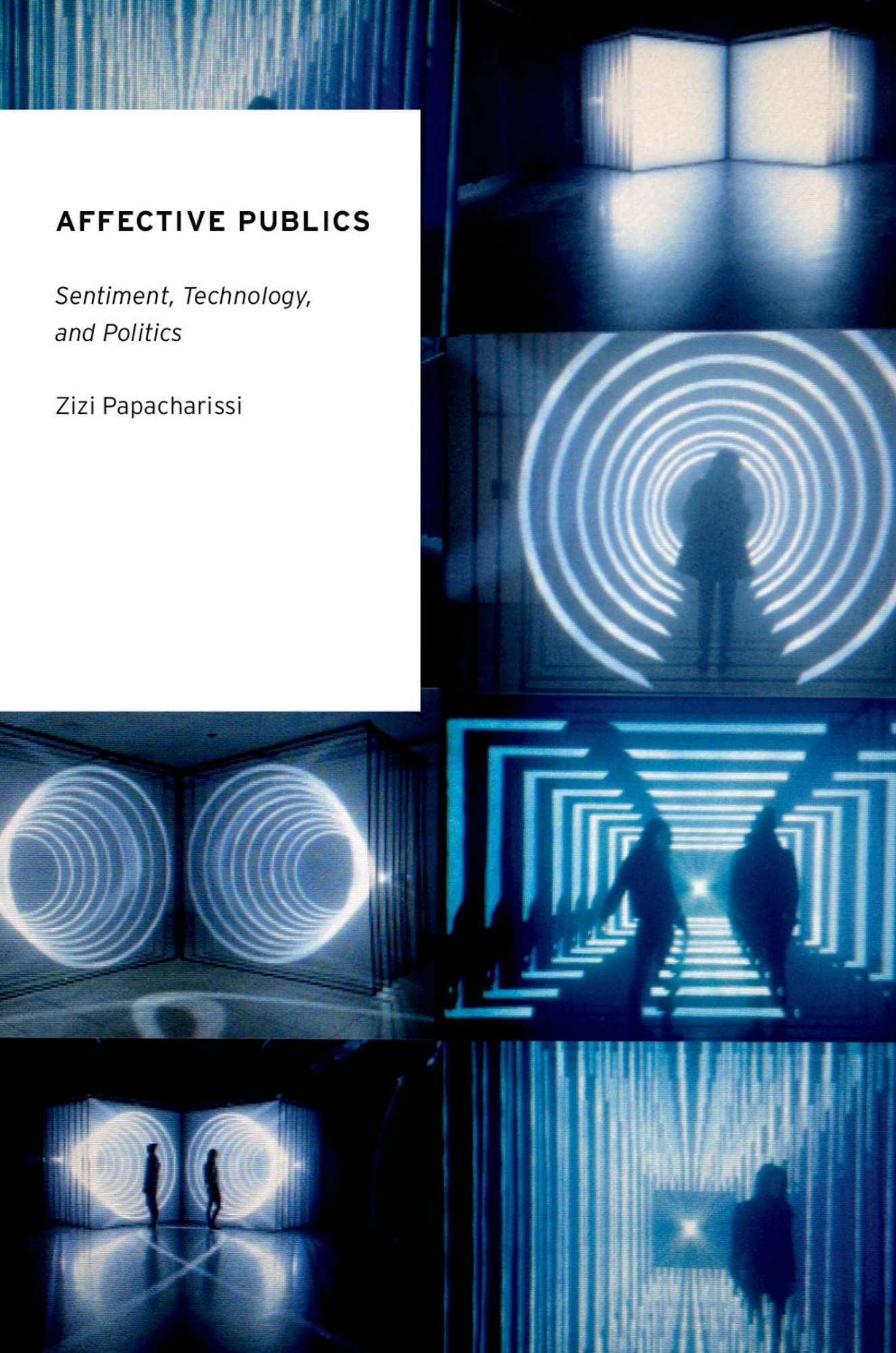

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Affective Publics

The Soft Structures of Engagement

This book is concerned with newer modalities of civic engagement sustained through networked media and how these lend form to emerging publics. At the core of this book lies a strong interest in structures of feeling and how these soft structures form the texture of online expression and connection. It is through understanding the soft structures of feeling, expression, and connection that I approach questions revolving around the impact of social media, specifically Twitter. I borrow the term *structures of feeling* from Raymond Williams, who employed it in *The Long Revolution* (1961) to describe the potential that lies in that which is emergent and the power or agency that may derive from the volatility of social experiences in the making. The term appeals to me for two reasons. First, it permits us to examine forms of engagement that exist within and beyond the structured sphere of opinion expression. Second, it suggests how spontaneous and organic responses accumulate into formed yet volatile structures that envelop an ever-developing habitus of civic engagement. Williams (1961) understood this structure of feeling to be "as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet [operating] in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities" (p. 64). Described by Williams as *social experiences in solution*, structures of feeling reflect the culture, the mood, and the feel of a particular historical moment. As such, they capture articulated thought but also suppressed narratives in ways that combine expressions of realized outcomes and unrealized potential.

Structures of feeling can be traced back to forms and conventions shared by those living through a particular era, but they should not reduced to what is frequently idealized as the spirit of an age. They could be potentially

understood as structures of experience in that they are derivative and referential of experiences, but they really pertain to "characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought; but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelated continuity" (Williams, 1977, p. 133). Williams points to the industrial novel of the 1840s as an example of one structure of feeling that emerged out of the development of industrial capitalism and summed up middle-class consciousness. In this manner, structures of feeling represent feeling that is organized and patterned but in ways that do not compromise its fluidity, that is, its ability to connect (and divide) differentiated classes of people and complex relations of structures. The deliberate contradiction between structure and feeling is meant to capture "a structure in the sense that you could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected—people weren't learning it from each other; yet it was one feeling much more than of thought—a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones" (Williams, 1979, p. 159). In the same manner, we may understand and further interpret collaborative discourses organized by hashtags on Twitter as structures of feeling, comprising an organically developed pattern of impulses, restraints, and tonality. Virally circulated YouTube videos or images rendered into memes as they are shared from person to person present structures of feeling. They are organized enough to facilitate sharing, yet open enough to permit differentiated classes of people to locate meaning in them and further infuse them with meaning. They are loosely demonstrative of the mood of the time, or *kairos*, and as such, are *socially solvent*.

Public Feelings and Affect

As a first point, I emphasize that in order to be accurately understood, the discourses produced via Twitter must be interpreted as such soft structures of feeling. They may not be confused with the deliberative structures presented through rationally organized modalities of civic engagement. This does not necessarily mean that they may not contain or allude to rational discourse or that rational discourse is not inclusive of affective elements. What it suggests is that sentiment, pre-formed and mediated, leads the way

into locating one's own place in a converged sphere of activity where sociocultural, economic, and political tendencies and tensions are collapsed. The work of Raymond Williams and the emphasis on structures of feeling anticipated affect as the active ingredient that infuses structures of feeling with different measures of intensity.

As a second point, I emphasize that public feelings, articulated via soft structures of feeling, populate diverse and interconnected public spheres that function as affect worlds (Berlant, 2011). Emotion and feeling define modalities of belonging that are articulated as strangers connect and attach to each other. Within and beyond the contours of rational and deliberative thought, these affective tropes of belonging "[rethink] publicness by looking at . . . cases in which the body politic in the politically depressive position tries *not* to enter reflective opinion while seeking a way, nonetheless, to maintain its desire for the political" (Berlant, 2009). Collaborative discourses generated through the logic of hashtags on Twitter may be understood as fostering tropes of belonging that evolve beyond the conventional mode of rational thought and deliberation. As affect mini-worlds, they invite a publicness that is politically sensitized yet generally dismissive of normatively defined political consciousness.

The publics that connected around the hashtags supporting the Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak were populated by individuals within and beyond Egypt. These people felt their own way into that particular event by contributing to a stream that blended emotion, drama, opinion, and news in a manner that departed from the conventional deliberative logic and aligned with the softer structure of affect worlds. Networked publics that connected and disconnected around #ows articulated a vernacular of political performativity that permitted citizens to simply stand and be counted without having to enter into complex ideological negotiation of a collectively shaped identity. The transient publics that drive daily trending topics of conversation on Twitter draw from a repertoire of playful performance strategies that rethink the personal as political, and the political as that which is personally felt. The question that drives this book and this last chapter revolves around modalities of engagement that develop within structures of feeling and how these modalities support liminal or transient public spheres that function as affect worlds. In short, what is the form that publics take on as they are called into being through the connective structures of feeling?

Affective Attunement and Networked Publics

Publics that actualize within the affect worlds sustained by Twitter are affective in form. Streams generated through the collaboratively discursive logic of the hashtag function as affective mechanisms that amplify the awareness of a particular feeling, the intensity with which it is felt. Tomkins (1995) specifically explains that by amplifying intensity, affect mechanisms permit us to obtain a sense of the urgency with which a particular symptom needs to be addressed. Similarly, news streams generated on Twitter function as affect modulators for people using them to connect with others and express their understanding of a particular issue. The connective and expressive affordances thus generated grant a given technology its own mediality, and this mediality invites particular *forms* or *textures* of affective attunement. Media sustain and transmit affect, and so a developing discourse via Twitter can sustain and transmit that form of intensity although the direction toward which it will develop depends on the focus of the particular stream. I understand the publics called into being by the discursive affordances of Twitter as *affective*: networked publics that are sustained by online media but also by modalities of affective intensity.

Affective attunement permits people to feel their way into politics. Publics assembled out of individuals feeling their way into a particular news stream generated via Twitter engage in practices of rebroadcasting, listening, remixing content, and creatively presenting their views—or fragments of their views—in ways that evolve beyond the conventional deliberative logic of a traditional public sphere. These practices permit people to tune into an issue or a particular problem of the times but also to affectively attune with it, that is, to develop a sense for their own place within this particular structure of feeling. The case studies addressed in this volume present different iterations of how distinct cultures or subcultures internalize repression and affectively react to it, utilizing Twitter as the platform for the expression of dissension.

Arguably, these manifestations of dissent take on a different character depending on the political, sociocultural, and economic context. While these expressions may occasionally inspire each other, they are shaped by the locality of their collective aspirations. So it becomes important to appreciate the global visibility these expressions attain via Twitter but not to lose sight of the local context from which they emerge. The various Arab Spring movements

were generally directed against authoritarian regimes but evolved in different ways and with varying outcomes. The *indignados* of Spain camped out in public squares just like the *Aganaktismenoi* of Greece, but the outrage they conveyed was the result of different sets of circumstances. Occupy congregations networked globally but were locally politicized by a mix of broader and geographically specific aspirations. Finally, the everyday expressions of the political found in trending Twitter topics blend public with private, and personal with political, to introduce affectively charged casual disruptions of stabilized cultural hierarchies. Still, three common threads characterized all movements:

1. A networked digitality. This permits publics forming around affective statements to self-actualize online and offline as they develop their own voice(s) and connect to diasporic publics around the globe. These formations of publics may be actual or imaginary, but they are meaningful in promising visibility and collectivity to previously marginalized voices. This networked digitality is sustained through practices of networked gatekeeping and networked framing that produce connective forms of action.
2. A generalized expression of indignation, discontent, or disagreement with ongoing, reinforced, and reproduced regimes.[1] These expressions are typically affectively rendered and can be interpreted as affective claims to agency. They are meaningful as shapeless sources of disorder that do not align with and may potentially pollute articulated structures.[2]
3. An algorithmically rendered materiality. Algorithms render affective gestures embodied, permitting them to attain discursive materiality and thus potentially develop into narratives of connection and discord or the in-between. This materiality is the product of the interaction between the affordances of each platform and the habitus of practices and predispositions toward technology that characterizes a given era.

Affective statements can potentially allow access to fluid or liquid forms of power that are meaningful to publics seeking to break into the ideological mainstream. In repressive regimes, affective statements communicating dislike or discontent with a particular regime of repression can result in surveillance or imprisonment for those expressing them. For marginalized cultures, affective statements are part of performing identities that otherwise become further repressed. In the contemporary political environment, affective

expressions communicate frustration with the inability to change a capitalist economic hierarchy that pre-determines privilege and organizes access to it in ways that are fixed and non-negotiable. Over time, affect may lead to subtle disruptions of power hierarchies, which cumulatively may produce considerable energies of resistance and renegotiation of boundaries.

At the same time, affect may also dominate expression and distract from factuality, as is the case with the affective structures that support the growth of the Tea Party movement in the United States. Affective mechanisms increase awareness of an issue and in so doing amplify the intensity of that awareness. They do not inherently enhance understanding of a problem, deepen one's level of knowledge on a particular issue, or lead to thick forms of civic engagement with public affairs. These things may indeed occur, but they present outcomes of other cognitive and behavioral processes that are connected to—but are also distinct from—affect mechanisms. This is why context is key in interpreting the meaning of affective mechanisms and the potential impact affective publics may generate. In the next few paragraphs, I synthesize my findings and existing research to present general parameters around which affective publics and the people populating them may lay claim to power and agency and the specific form that power and agency take on.

Affect, Granularity, and Liminality

Describing the impact that platforms like Twitter have on expression, engagement, and ultimately democracy requires locating them within the historical continuum of technology out of which they have evolved. Twitter and similar net-supported platforms inherently engage users in ways that are cultural—by expanding sources and means of information and learning, tools for cultural production and innovation, and the spaces where communication takes place (Yang, 2009). Each platform of course contains its own affordances that invite particular uses and thus lend the platform unique cultural significance within a historical or geographic context. For most users, political interest is activated through avenues that are of a cultural nature, and these involve offering access to more information, providing ways to remix and play with information, and supporting spaces where people may discuss this information further. This does not constitute a characteristic unique to our era or net-supported platforms. Many of the

idealized public spheres of the past (Habermas, 1962/1989) consisted of social environments that sustained political engagement in ways that were deeply ingrained in the cultural ethos of the society. The agoras of Ancient Greece blended commerce, politics, and casual philosophizing into the culture of everyday routines. Similarly, coffeehouses in eighteenth-century Europe emerged out of a particular cultural context to support various forms of social interaction in ways that aligned with the rhythms of everyday work and life routines of the era. Spaces that stimulate political interest, expression, and engagement work best when they invite impromptu, casual, and unforced forays into the political. The spaces of politics have always merged activities of an economic, political, and sociocultural nature, and the spaces rendered by networked platforms further amplify this convergence (Papacharissi, 2010).

The premise is simple. To understand the civic import of such technologies, we need to interpret them not as forces that bring about change, do activism, or enact impact. They are networked infrastructures that present people with environments of a social nature, supporting interactions that are aligned with the particular cultural ethos deriving from historical or geographic context. As socioculturally shaped architectures, they sustain activities that are organized around information sharing and learning, creativity and innovation, and discourse—or more specifically in the case of the latter, specific varieties of storytelling. What is of particular interest here is the form of sharing and learning, the nature of creativity and innovation, and the texture of conversation that take shape within the environments formed by networked platforms—in this case, Twitter.

Rich literature informs our understanding of the meaning of technology in contemporary societies, drawing our attention to the ability of net-related platforms to pluralize expression (e.g., Bimber, 1998; van Dijk, 2012) in ways that may lend voice and visibility to underrepresented points of view (e.g., Couldry, 2010) but that may also compartmentalize opinion tropes into homophilous silos (e.g., Sunstein, 2001).

Yet speculation on the potential impact of technology commonly draws from soft to stark determinism, which misunderstands the place of the net-related platforms (e.g., Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2012). These deterministic tendencies view net-related technologies as *forces* that bring about change rather than as environments that invite particular varieties of behaviors, depending on their affordances *and* the sociocultural context within which these affordances are utilized. And while many net-related platforms

bear the potential of allowing conversations to be more porous, this will not always be the case, particularly when conversations take place within groups that are ideologically padlocked, such as the extremist Nazi or racist silos that self-organize through a variety of online resources. Those conversations have never been nor will they ever be pluralized, regardless of the technological platform they reside in. By contrast, collaborative narratives that form out of established and fairly homophilous spheres of interaction may evolve into more open and pluralized deliberative structures; this was the case with all three studies of Twitter streams examined in this volume. Yet at the same time, these pluralized conversations take on different meaning and serve different functions depending on context, which is why it was essential to examine and compare three case studies that were similar but also different enough to let us examine the interplay between affordances, cultural context, and, in this particular case, affect.

The role of sociocultural context in shaping the outcome of digitally enabled expression and connection cannot be emphasized enough. This is a simple enough point to make and one that is illustrated in abundant research—most notably work that illustrates how social media have been utilized by recent social movements in the MENA region and Europe (e.g., Howard, 2011; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). What requires further explication, however, is the role of sociocultural context in shaping whether, which, and how affordances of technologies will be deployed by networked publics. In this manner, sociocultural context informs the conditions under which people utilize the affordances of technologies to lay claim to agency and potentially to power. What may function as a digitally enabled path to agency in one sociocultural context may produce radically different results under a different set of social circumstances. In all three case studies examined, the discursive affordances of Twitter supported diverse practices that developed in a variety of directions because they were born out of singularly combined sociocultural conditions. Digitally enabled paths to agency and power are activated variably based on the interplay between human agency and structure that defines sociocultural context.

This is a simple enough point to make, yet it gains explanatory gravitas when theorized through the lens of the *habitus*. The construct was developed by Bourdieu to overcome a number of binary divisions in the social sciences and in particular to address the duality of structure and agency. Human agency both renders and is rendered through social structure, demonstrating how "social structures are both constituted by human agency,

and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution" (Giddens, 1979, p. 121). Broadly defined as a set of durable dispositions that enable structured improvisations of individuals, all guiding social life, the habitus invites both ambiguity and flexibility in terms of how it is interpreted, perhaps by design (Park, 2009). Regardless, it is useful because it does not separate structure from agency, explaining how "embodied dispositions . . . are generated by structural features of that same social world" and "agents' dispositions to act are themselves *formed* out of preexisting social contexts" (Couldry, 2004, p. 358).

Bourdieu (1990) suggests that "being the product of a particular class of objective regularities, the habitus tends to generate all the 'reasonable,' 'commonplace' behaviours," which provides a comforting homogeneity for the individual. The habitus is the product of long and ongoing processes of socialization that impart practices taken for granted. These practices do present habituated actions but are exercised through patterns that may be more organic and less codified or obedient to these structures. At the same time, these practices gain meaning as they are enacted within communities of practice, thus referencing structural context. As a result, the habitus informs the manner in which the capabilities of a particular platform are utilized and thus informs the texture of digitally enabled forms of expression and connection. Because the notion of the habitus contains all tendencies and tensions deriving from articulated practices that affirm and seek to negate structure, it affords emerging streams of expression and connection online their unique digital imprint. The dialectical and relational practices adopted as people express themselves and connect online are the product of what the technology invites and of pre-established practices that people feel comfortable engaging in. Moreover, the affordances of the technology itself are the product of a habitus, that is, a prevailing understanding of habituated practices that are part new and part habitual. The construct of the habitus is meaningful because it historicizes the new by drawing attention to the practices that connect it to the present.

While the affordances of a particular technology emerge and are utilized within a habitus of wonted and recurring practices, they also suggest ways in which familiar practices may be remediated. In mediated architectures of everyday sociality, like those presented by social network sites, social beings' behaviors emerge out of the social context they find themselves in. Agency claimed challenges pre-existing structure but is simultaneously reproduced by and reproductive of structure. In the context of technological

convergence, the properties of online media afford the duality of structure and agency an accelerated reflexivity. This accelerated reflexivity is both sustained and remediated by something we may understand as a habitus of the new, a set of dispositions invited and regenerated by and via a state of permanent novelty (Papacharissi & Easton, 2013). This constantly-in-flux mode may also be characterized as the permanently beta ethic of continual change (Neff & Stark, 2004). The habitus in and of itself embeds reflexivity, first because it describes how practices are constantly yet subtly evolving in ways that affirm and extend our comfort zones, and second because the agency contained within these practices is constituted within and in reaction to structure. Within the habitus of the new, this reflexivity that grants habituated practices both meaning and potential for agency is accelerated in a way that reorganizes our expectations, reduces stability, and sustains the feeling that something new is about to happen. The rhythms of accelerated reflexivity are driven by an almost obligatory anticipation of the new (Papacharissi, Streeter, & Gillespie, 2013). This state of constant transitionality, marked by design that anticipates and invites that which is new, reinforces a state of permanent liminality.

Liminality refers to events, processes, or individuals pertaining to the threshold of or an initial stage of a process. The anthropologist Victor Turner drew from the work of Arnold van Gennep (1909) on rites of passage to present a theory of liminality meant to describe stages of transition and in-between positions that liminal individuals occupy. Turner understood liminality as a position of social and structural ambiguity or as "the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1967, p. 97). A group of liminal actors is characterized by a lack of social markers and an in-between stage of social heterarchy that renders all actors equal for the time being. Users participating in news gathering, listening, and disseminating are engaged in these processes from a liminal point of access. Liminality is a middle point in a dialogue about what is news in a society. It is a transitional but essential stage in finding one's own place in the story and doing so from a position that allows autonomy and potential for agency. In order for this dialogue to be rendered liminal, all previous hierarchy about what makes news must be abandoned, and therein lies the empowering potential of liminality. At the same time, the very function of liminality is to abandon structure so as to permit activity that will result in the birthing of a new structure, and therein lie both

potential empowerment and disempowerment. Turner understands "liminality as a phase in social life in which this confrontation between 'activity which has no structure' and its 'structured results' produces in men their highest pitch of self-consciousness" (1974, p. 255).

Individuals participating in liminal forms of news storytelling engage in a variety of practices that both reproduce and forget past conventions of news production and consumption. I describe these stages of collaborative news co-creation as liminal because engagement relies on the temporary dismantling of news rituals so as to be able to collectively (re)produce new ones. It is easy to read these as processes of news production. But they are primarily about utilizing tools of news production and consumption to find one's own place in the story (Robinson, 2009). Liminality affords the opportunity for actors engaging and making meaning out of the story to approach the event on equal footing and to feel their own place in the story. Engaged in various stages of *produsage,* storytelling audiences occupy a liminal space, a space of transition, as they contribute to turning an event into a story. But liminality is a temporary state, defined as the midpoint between beginning and end. It is set into motion as an initiated action attempts to undo social structures or conventions, and it ends as the initiated action is (re)integrated into social structure. The ambient, hybrid, and *produsedpractices of liking, retweeting, liveblogging, endorsing, and opining that are frequently blended into social reactions to news events are also liminal. They present personal and temporary content injections that play their own in part in turning a news event into a story. As such, they are inspired by the potential of what the *produsedstory might look like, however temporary the lasting effect of these subjective content interpolations may be. In the next few paragraphs, I explain how their form is affective.

Affective Publics

Drawing from research presented in the previous chapters, I suggest that crowds become mobilized via online networks of support in ways that discursively render *affective publics.* I define affective publics as networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment. Resting on boyd's (2010) understanding of networked publics, I interpret affective publics as publics that have been transformed by networked technologies to suggest both space for the

interaction of people, technology, and practices and the imagined collective that evolves out of this interaction. boyd (2010) presents the properties of persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability as the four defining affordances of networked publics. Persistence avails digital permanence to the discursive iterations of networked publics. Replicability makes it easier to reproduce and further remix discursive material. Scalability lends the potential of virality to discourses spreading through networks and networked media. Searchability permits loosely organized lines of commentary to transform into indexable and evolving narratives, organized through tags or the innate organizing logic of algorithms.

Importantly, however, the architecture that enables networked publics to attain discursive materiality is an architecture that thrives on, invites, and rewards *sharing*. Shareability evolves out of these four affordances but also functions as an affordance that invites and discourages particular genres of social activities. Networks are only as active as the information flowing through them. It is not that networks do not exist without information sharing, but it is the act of information sharing that renders them visible. In this sense, actor nodes materialize digitally as they share information. If it is the act of information sharing that presences actors, then this act can be read as an act of agency and we can begin to understand networked publics as publics defined by the sharing of information.

The construct of affective publics builds on the idea of networked publics to explicate what publics look like when all they render and are rendered out of is the sharing of opinions, facts, sentiment, drama, and performance. We know that these publics are networked. All publics are networked although the mediality of the networks may differ. What do these publics sound like? It is the form of mediality that supports and invites a particular tonality of expression. The pressing question revolves around the texture of expression that an architecture anticipates and rewards but also the ways in which expression, understood as information sharing, brings that architecture to life. How do these iterations of networked publics talk, what are prevailing practices, and as these tendencies and tensions are absorbed into our habitus of civic practices, what avenues for engagement, agency, and power do they avail *and* normalize?

The research presented in this volume leads to the following five points, which present defining tendencies of *affective publics*. These tendencies and tensions summarize the tonality that these publics attain as they the discursively materialize through the organizational logic of online platforms like

Twitter. They present five propositions for how we may interpret the civic gravitas that technologies of premediation and remediation afford.

1. *Affective publics materialize uniquely and leave distinct digital footprints.*

The digital texture of publics engaging with an issue online will vary depending on what that issue is, the sociocultural context, a variety of political economy system factors, and the mediality of the platform itself. This may strike some as an obvious point, and indeed it is meant to be. It is emphasized because despite its pedestrian nature, it is frequently forgotten in favor of rhetoric that either overestimates or minimizes the impact of social media. It is frequently assumed that Twitter and the variety of social platforms it interconnects will yield the same results for all publics utilizing it, but it does not. The research findings presented in this volume revealed how use of the platform supported different discourses. These were collaboratively curated into narratives that harmoniously united publics around #egypt and the affective frame of a revolution. In a different context, they reproduced existing political divides that affectively stalled the polyphony of #ows. And in the setting of everyday trending tags, they temporarily and loosely connected publics by virtue of connecting deliberately spontaneous performances of the politics of the self. These publics materialized uniquely and in ways that generated distinct digital footprints. What all these publics have in common is that their engagement online via Twitter permitted them to feel more intensely. The affective intensity of the platform, expressed through mobilized support, release of tension, and general opinion expression, amplified awareness of a particular event, issue, or conversation.

For publics tuning into and being connected through the discourses of #egypt, the resulting streams presented a mix of news, opinion, fact, and drama, all driven by a fixation with instantaneity and intense anticipation of what might happen next. These streams supported an affectively driven form of news, *produsedvia* the hybrid logics of networked gatekeeping and networked framing. The publics contributing to #ows functioned as networked gatekeepers and collaboratively framed the stream into an open signifier for the concept of #occupy. Networked actors were reluctant to elevate anyone to prominence, thus producing a crowd-sourced hierarchy of leading nodes, and they were reluctant to suggest a particular direction beyond the sheer *movement* of Occupy. In this sense, #ows was keenly affective for it was presented in ways that stated its potential without seeking to define it. For

this particular context, however, the Occupy chant invited both affective attunement and discord with the movement. And yet in the end, this may have not been disruptive for a public interested in generating affective intensity, that is, in providing supporters an opportunity to stand up and be counted under the idea of #ows. Finally, the atomized contributions to trending conversations that typically fly under the civic radar and do not count as formally political permitted networked actors to presence their own politics of the self. Seemingly non-important, because they often did not pertain to issues that hierarchies of knowledge identify as current affairs, they referenced the poetry and poignancy of the ordinariness of everyday life. In so doing, they are political because they challenge our habitus for what should be considered public affairs. They are affective because they suggest a particular movement toward a certain direction but have dissolved by the time that direction has formed and have already transformed into something else. The networked rhythms of content produced a different tonality for each public or set of affectively interconnected publics.

2. Affective publics support connective yet not necessarily collective action.

Connective action emerges out of personal frames on current affairs coalescing via the expressive and connective affordances of networked platforms, including Twitter. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) see connective action as a normative predisposition for individuals who align with issue publics on the basis of life politics. As a natural outcome of individualization tendencies that require people to structure and reflexively restructure their own lives, connective action practices permit people to express interest in or allegiance to issues without having to enter into complex negotiation of personal versus collective politics. Online and convergent platforms like Twitter serve as conduits that link together personalized interests, thus enabling people to connect around commonalities without having to compromise their own belief systems. The streams studied in this volume sustained such forms of expression. They connected individual viewpoints and in so doing organically assembled collaborative but not collective narratives.

#Egypt may have produced the shared frame of a revolution in the making well before the movement had resulted in regime reversal, but this frame was not the result of collective deliberation. The frame of a revolution in the making emerged as individuals affectively tuned into the developing stream to express support for the idea of the revolution without entering into a

conversation on what the pragmatics of a revolution would entail. Tellingly, the movement has produced a couple of regime reversals since then but has yet to yield reforms that many Egyptians would term revolutionary. #Ows embraced the principle of connective action from the onset of the movement, issuing an open call for alignment with the broad idea of Occupy. The resulting expressive tendencies were affective in nature and divided the stream into cohorts of support or opposition that were far from deliberative. The playful and personalized contributions to everyday trending tags did not aim at conversation but at deliberately improvised showing off of the self. The tendency was connective but similar to the connection formed between a performer and an ever-evolving, partially imagined, audience.

There is something inherently democratic and surficial about connective practices. On the one hand, they pluralize interaction and make developing narratives more porous. On the other hand, they facilitate thin or monitorial varieties of engagement that may—but do not necessarily—morph into deeper forms of civic involvement. In earlier work, I described online environments as *supersurfaces* (Papacharissi, 2010). I borrowed the term from architecture to describe the spatial possibilities that open up when space is cut up, folded, and woven into new patterns. I explained that online environments function much like supersurfaces; they extend space but attain meaning and potential impact only if they are somehow connected to a core structure. Similarly, the affective intensity these streams lend becomes meaningful when it elicits feelings of community and identity; without this direction, it revels in its own feedback loop. In order to reach its full potential, affective intensity must be released.

3. *Affective publics are powered by affective statements of opinion, fact, or a blend of both, which in turn produce ambient, always-on feeds that further connect and pluralize expression in regimes democratic and otherwise.*

Aligned with the logic of connective action, affective publics produce and are driven by streams that are collections of opinions, facts, and emotion blended into one effusive stream to the point that it is difficult to discern one variety of expression from the other—and doing so misses the point. The point is that these streams enable diverse distant publics to connect with, monitor, and affectively tune into an evolving event or issue. The resulting feeds sustain an ambient, always-on environment supportive of social and peripheral awareness for the people and publics connected. For a stream that

is structured around live broadcasts of events going on, like #egypt or #ows, this ambience is essential in providing constant updates, even when not much is happening or other media are not covering the story. What becomes particularly interesting is the type of storytelling these streams sustain and the extent to which the stories told via Twitter align or diverge from the stories told via other channels. We may understand each stream as generating its own event and thus we can distinguish between different events sustained via the affective intensity of Twitter, the mediality of TV, or the affect of newspapers. The mediated texture of these events, that is, their mediality, provides listening publics with a different lens for relating to these events, a lens consisting of varying or overlapping assemblages of images, words, video, audio, and other affective stimuli that we use to turn the world outside into the pictures in our heads (Lippmann, 1922).

Lippmann used these words to describe the way in which people weave together information from mediated reports of events to construct their pseudoenvironments of worlds too distant, complex, or big for them to experience directly. People live in the same world, Lippmann (1922) had suggested, but "they think and feel in different ones" (p. 20). The texture of storytelling on #egypt permitted previously unconnected publics to feel their way into what the movement meant for Egypt at that moment. The open and polyphonous nature of discourse on #ows was aligned with the spirit of the movement but it reaffirmed that discordant publics living in the same world feel and think in markedly distinct ways. Finally, the playful discourses of trending tags collapsed multiple pseudoenvironments into one, reinforcing the politics of subjective pluralism: we feel subjectively but project those feelings publicly with aspirations of collectivity, striving for diverse recognition of that subjectivity. We feel our way into the softer, ambient structures of affect worlds.

4. *Affective publics typically produce disruptions/interruptions of dominant political narratives by presencing underrepresented viewpoints.*

Inevitably, platforms that afford broadcasting capabilities invite pluralized narratives, provided of course that they are accessible to diverse publics. The softer storytelling structures afforded by Twitter invite immediate and improvised contributions to developing stories about events and issues. Stories engage through their potential for affective attunement by persuading "through their appeal to emotion rather than reason, through an affective identification that supersedes logic and evidence" (Polletta, 2006, p. 82).

The condensed nature of these contributions collapses storytelling conventions that distinguish fact from opinion and from emotion into subjectively narrated realities. These affectively charged micro-narratives typically produce disruptions or interruptions of dominant political narratives, inviting others to tune and feel their way into their own place in politics. Cumulative and cascading expressions of such forms of connective action may result in more substantial forms of political impact, depending on context.

The potential for disruption or interruption derives from the fact that these narratives amplify visibility for viewpoints that were not as prevalent before. The developing narratives blend print storytelling practices, described by Ong (1982) as a secondary orality, with the traditions of oral forms of storytelling understood as a primary orality. The resulting streams blend news facts with the drama of interpersonal conversation and combine news reports with emotionally filled and opinionated reactions to the news in a manner that makes it difficult to discern news from conversation about the news—and doing so misses the point. The more deliberate and self-conscious storytelling invited by print and electronic media is thus reconciled with the additive and participatory nature of oral storytelling practices, producing a form of orality we may understand as digital. The *liminality* inherent in these streams, which occupy the in-between space where primary and secondary oralities meet, makes them ambiguous: they contain both empowering and disempowering potential for those participating in them. It is this ambiguity, however, that also affirms their polysemous nature and potential for contagion.

5. *Ambient streams sustain publics convened around affective commonalities: impact is symbolic, agency claimed is semantic, power is liminal.*

Affective publics are convened discursively around similarities or differences in sentiment. The additive architecture of platforms like Twitter compiles these discourses into organically developed narratives of a granular texture. These narratives take the form of ambient streams that sustain engagement with a particular issue, event, or public, primarily through permitting citizens to feel their place into a developing story. Such ambient streams sustain publics convened around affective commonalities, leading sometimes to the affectively charged claims of the Tea Party or the broad ideological refrains of the Occupy movement or, in tandem with offline activities, to regime reversals.

The impact created through these streams as they develop into granular narratives is first and foremost symbolic. When combined with a number of independent or coordinated activities, these streams can help sustain movements that may yield political impact of a specific form, like a regime reversal, a call for elections, or a shift in the balance of power that may produce further legislative, social, economic, and cultural changes. Change is a gradual process, however, and the futurity of any impact is always susceptible to context. #Egypt sustained a movement that had commenced long before the advent of Twitter and perhaps the Internet; it presented a digital iteration of a movement that was released through a number of political avenues and activities, including digital pathways. The impact was sizable and the iteration was political, sociocultural, economic, and rich in symbolic meaning. However, it has yet to yield a democratic form of government that the majority of the people of Egypt are content with.

Unlike #egypt, #ows did not produce a reversal of the economic regime that it confronted. Still, the impact of a movement like Occupy derived from its ability to semantically renegotiate some constants, some fixed aspects of a particular field, and the terms of a particular habitus and make them more fluid and flexible. For the supporters of Occupy, the stream facilitated their claim to semantic agency and it also invited attempts from opposing publics to semantically delegitimize the movement's core message. The impact generated by Occupy and #ows is primarily symbolic and is substantial in its symbolism as it presents the most widespread and effective effort to counter the prevailing logic of late-modern capitalism to date. It remains to be seen whether the attempt to semantically modify the terms on which the economics of global capitalism play out will evolve beyond what it has been so far: a (firm) challenge. Yet the connective affordances of a platform like Twitter, together with other civic pathways for connection, permitted that semantic challenge to attain affective intensity.

The evanescent publics that convene around daily trending topics revel in the symbolic, the semantic, and the liminal. It is through semantic means that they seek to define the personal as political and thus lay claim to agency. The impact generated through playful and deliberately improvised tweets is symbolic for actors who toy with the idea of making private thoughts public. Performativity permits affective publics to assemble semantic claims of agency, although the nature of the performance is sensitive to sociocultural context and the politics of the self. Empowerment for these actors is liminal—transitional and capable of a lengthier duration only to the extent

that the synergy of systemic factors will permit these disruptions to become contagious and thus pollute established hierarchies of order.[3]

The practices of these publics present a departure from the rationally based deliberative protocols of public spheres and help us reimagine how we may define and understand civic discourse among networked crowds in a digital era. While emotion has never been absent from the construction of political expression, romanticized idealizations of past civic eras magnify the significance of rational discourse and skim over the affective infrastructure of civic engagement. My effort here involves synthesizing research findings to present a theoretical model for understanding affective publics—public formations that are textually rendered into being through emotive expressions that spread virally through networked crowds.

Affective publics materialize and disband around connective conduits of sentiment every day and find their voice through the soft structures of feeling sustained by societies. Twitter serves as a conduit of interconnected structures of feeling, lending rise to not just sentiment-driven publics but connecting and redirecting expansive meme-plexes of expression deriving from a variety of media, social and not. Affective publics drove the tag #NSAPickUpLines, convened via Tumblr and Twitter, in response to news that National Security Agency officers sometimes abuse domestic intelligence privileges to monitor love interests (top retweeted: "I bet you're tired of guys who only pretend to listen. #NSAPickupLines" and "I know exactly where you have been all my life #NSAPickUpLines"). Affective publics assembled behind the tag #MuslimRage in response to *Newsweek*'s cover image exploiting protests in the Middle East and popular stereotypes about Muslims. Readers responded playfully and sarcastically, mocking the premise of shock journalism and cultural stereotyping with photos and texts that spread virally through Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. US citizens watching the 2012 Presidential Election debates affectively gathered around tags like #FireBigBird, #BindersFullofWomen, or #horsesandbayonets, with playful commentary that released pent up sentiment through memes spreading via Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook. The top tweeted photograph in 2012—and ever, at the time—showed Michelle Obama hugging her re-elected husband; it was tweeted before he took the stage to affirm his election victory and retweeted, favorited, or reposted heavily in affectively expressed support of his victory. Twitter use during the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting helped grieving publics cope, express support, and seek to understand how an event like that can take place.

These are just a few examples of countless occasions for affective attunement to pressing issues and events. What they all have in common is engagement that is sentiment driven and that forms around *structures of feeling.* Affective publics are not specific to Twitter. Radio broadcasts sustained a contagious structure of feeling during the Greek student uprisings against the military regime in the 1970s, as illustrated through the example that introduced this volume and the concept of affective publics. Songs, music performances, and genres interconnect crowds and lend form to publics that bond around shared affective intensities. Television series and genres present structures of feeling emblematic of the affective intensities of a given era. The platform of Twitter was employed as a starting point. As its own structure of feeling, it helps focus this volume around issues, cultural artifacts, and discourses that are specific to the present era. Convergent or spreadable media become meaningful as they disperse content through formal and informal networks (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Twitter served as an apt starting point for this analysis, because it interconnects and remediates a variety of communicative conduits that further disperse content across other platforms, like Facebook, Tumblr, YouTube; similar social network sites; and broader meme-plexes that are activated online and offline. Affective publics evolve within and beyond Twitter.

While sentiment-driven modalities of civic engagement may invite a politics of sympathy and frequently empathy, they should not be construed as being devoid of rational thought or reason. The main point is that affective attunement is driven, and by driven, I mean *energized* or *powered* by sentiment-driven modalities. These do not favor emotion over reason; and affect should not be mistaken for emotion, for it is not that. It is the intensity with which we experience both reason and emotion. Structures of feeling invite affective attunement with *thought as feeling and feeling as thought,* thus not prioritizing one over the other but striving toward a meaningful balance between the two that is specific to a certain era. Popular discourses about normative forms of civic engagement frequently set emotion against reason and feeling against thought. Thus, certain forms of civic engagement are termed inadequate for being too emotional and lacking rational foundation while others are termed too logical and stripped of emotional engagement. And yet logic and emotion can and do co-exist. In quintessential Spinozian terms, logic helps interpret emotion and emotion gives meaning to logic. They are not opposite endpoints of a continuum but are meant to work together and inform one another toward structures of feelings (e.g., Gould, 2010); they are organized and open at the same

time in a loose, evolving, and fluid narrative that seeks to make meaning of events populating our everyday course of life.

Structures of feeling open up and sustain discursive spaces where stories can be told. There are particular storytelling practices that become prevalent in the discursive spaces presented by convergent and spreadable media, and these practices invite certain varieties of engagement. Networked framing and networked gatekeeping explain how interconnected people collaboratively curate and co-create narratives. Affective attunement clarifies how individuals first approach these discourses as actors preparing to engage in discourses as narratives. Connective action describes the modalities of action that shape and are shaped by these structures of feeling wherein impact generated is symbolic, agency is semantic, and power is of a liminal and granular nature. Promising areas of future work lie in explicating the mediality of different discursive spaces and the form of affective attunement and engagement these invite. Affect explains the intensity with which something is experienced; it refers to just that: intensity. Feeling with great intensity does not necessarily lead to deep understanding or engagement with an issue. Affect is capable of supporting thin, moderate, or thick forms of engagement or deep understanding of issues. It represents the way in but does not guarantee a particular outcome; it "greases the wheels of ideology, but it also gums them up" (Gould, 2009, p. 27). To this end, we may examine particular varieties of narratives that facilitate deeper understanding of issues—for example, slow- versus fast-paced news narratives and varieties of literacies that help us generate deeper readings and meaning-making of the many structures of feeling populating our everyday world.

Structures of feeling afforded by convergent and spreadable media are liminal structures: fluid and always in flux, in a state of permanent novelty, transitionality, and reflexivity (Papacharissi, Streeter, & Gillespie, 2013). Affect is the key variable in measuring the symbolic impact of these stories as we try to understand the intensity with which their symbolism is anticipated, felt, and processed. Still, in order for these stories to generate impact that is beyond symbolic, a variety of contextual factors—better described as *the longue durée*, or the long haul of history—must be considered.

At the same time, the power of evolving stories and the media we use to tell and spread them should not be undermined, as these stories gradually form *the longue durée*; and in the short time frame of the present, they present ways for individuals to claim semantic agency by telling their own story and thus potentially making meaning of and contributing to how a greater

narrative is formed. To a certain extent, people have always sought agency of a semantic nature by wanting to tell their own stories of who they are and how they relate to the world surrounding them. They seek agency by trying to determine how their personal narrative connects to normative and evolving narratives for understanding the world—that is, social experiences in the making. The orality of storytelling has evolved from being primary and interpersonally motivated to secondary and print oriented to digital.[4] The evolution of oralities and their respective interfaces for telling stories generate their own literacies, which further include and exclude storytellers and their stories. For students of evolving oralities, every artifact tells a story—if one knows how to read it.

Notes

Prelude

1. Political, used here and throughout the volume in the noun form, refers to emergent expressions, orientations, environments, and general modalities of a political nature.

Chapter 1

1. The term *supersurfaces* is popular among architects, as a way of describing spatial possibilities enabled by the technique of folding, so as to show how flat surfaces can be transformed into volumes through cutting, weaving, twisting, winding, and further manipulating woven forms (Vyzoviti, 2001, 2003). I use the term to describe how the discursive spaces rendered by net-based platforms relate to the materiality of physical spaces (Papacharissi, 2010). They extend and pluralize spaces for conversation and mobilization organically, in ways that feel empowering and meaningful. At the same time, without direct connections to the systemic core of civic institutions, their ability to effect institutional change is compromised.

Chapter 2

1. The term "presence" refers to making things visible, and is used elsewhere in relevant literature, most recently in Couldry, N. (2012), Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice. Cambridge: Polity.
2. Archives were obtained from the online archive service Twapperkeeper, an online tool for capturing public timelines, or archives, of tweets more extensive than the ones provided by the Twitter API. The archives constructed included tweets generated during the aforementioned time period and contained the text of tweets, hashtags, keywords, date and time stamps, and miscellaneous bits of backend information based on user set preferences. Usernames were also included, but were removed from the file for further analysis.
3. Unfortunately, because Arabic characters were not recognizable by the content analysis tools, the approximately 400,000 tweets containing them had to be dropped from the subsequent content and discourse analyses. Nonetheless, given that the focus was on global news, listening practices, and news values, the sample fit the study objectives in spite of this limitation. A total of approximately 1.1 million tweets

utilizing Latin characters, some of which were multilingual, were used for the content and discourse analyses.

4. The frequency analysis was conducted using R and open source scripts available online.
5. SQL scripts were written for the most frequent users addressed by the @ sign, the RT function, and the VIA marker across both the entire time period and on a day-by-day basis. These queries sought to locate and compare individuals, groups, or institutions who became prominent news storytellers across the RT, via, and @ signs.
6. SQL queries against the database provided frequency counts of hashtag usage in tweets across the entire period. These hashtags were mapped against real-world events as they unfolded in the Arab Spring region and were compared with the findings of the centering resonance analysis.
7. Actor-to-actor data matrices were created based on ties of addressivity, and network visualizations were generated through UCINET and Netdraw on subgroups of prominent actors in an effort to further examine the density of ties and the nature of connections among these prominent individuals.
8. A sample of 9,000 tweets was drawn from the #egypt corpus using stratification to ensure the generation of a representative sample. This sample was analyzed using centering resonance analysis (CRA), a mode of computer-assisted network-based text analysis that represents the content of large sets of texts by identifying the most important words that link other words in the network (Corman & Dooley, 2006; Corman, Kuhn, McPhee, & Dooley, 2002). CRA calculates words' influence within texts and sets of texts, using their position in the textual network and specifically the coefficient of betweenness centrality, defined by Corman et al. (2002) as "the extent to which a particular centering word mediates chains of association in the CRA network" (p. 177). Node aggregation of the most influential words is indicative of authors' storytelling practices and preferences, regarding word choice and message construction. The concept of resonance also permits within and across texts comparisons, so as to detect similarities and differences. The more two texts frequently use the same words in influential positions, the more word resonance they have, meaning that communicators tended to these words more, and that these words were prominent in structuring the text's coherence.
9. Preliminary findings from the analysis have been reported in Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012), and Meraz and Papacharissi (2013).
10. The quantitative approach adopted in this analysis—centering resonance analysis—is designed to back out patterns of meanings found on precise mathematical rules, avoiding in this way coder bias (Oliveira & Murphy, 2009). The most influential words are those in black boxes; words with slightly lesser influence have gray boxes; and less influential words are unboxed. The lines in the map depicted levels of associations among words, with darker lines depicting stronger associations (Corman & Dooley, 2006).

Chapter 3

1. See also Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013.
2. Initial findings were first reported in Papacharissi and Meraz, 2012.
3. During the time period that the Occupy movement was monitored in this study through the #ows tag, we noted 40,569 instances of unique hashtags that were used 773,102 times. The top 10% of hashtags, or 4,057 hashtags, were responsible for 92%, or 712,855 of the 773,102 usages, with the most predominant hashtags being #ows, #occupy, #occupywallstreet, #p2, and #tcot. See also Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013, for further detail on these analyses.

Chapter 4

1. Reliability for all content analysis variables was calculated using the Perreault and Leigh (1989) reliability index: $Ir = \{[(Fo/N)—(1/k)][k/(k—1)]\}.5$, for $Fo/n>1/k$, where *Fo* is the observed frequency of agreement between coders, *N* is the total number of judgments, and *k* is the number of categories. This index accounts for coder chance agreement and the number of categories used and is sensitive to coding weaknesses. Reliability scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater intercoder agreement.
2. All correlations reported in this article are statistically significant at $p < .05$, .01, or .001 levels.

Chapter 5

1. For more extensive documentation of these trends, see Castells (2012), *Networks of Outrage and Hope.*
2. See Douglas (1966) and Chapter 1, where the relationship between form and nonform, structure and disruption, and contagion and affect are explicated.
3. See Douglas (1966).
4. See Ong (1982), but also Galloway (2012).

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