Power in the Age of Social Media
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Abstract
There are a lot of claims about social and other media's power today: Some say that we have experienced Twitter and Facebook revolutions. Others claim that social media democratise the economy or bring about a participatory culture. Other observers are more sceptical and stress social media's realities as tools of control. Understanding social media requires a critical theory of society that uses a dialectical concept of power. A critical theory of society can then act as framework for understanding power in the age of social media. This chapter is a contribution to critically theorising media power in the age of social media. It categorises different notions of power, introduces a dialectical notion of media power discusses the dialectics of social media power, and draws some conclusions about the need for a dialectical and critical theory of the media and society (section 5).

1. Introduction

2011 was also the year, in which various Occupy movements emerged in North America, Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom and other countries. One of their protest tactics is to build protest camps on public squares that are centres of gravity for discussions, events and protest activities. Being asked about the advantages of Occupy's use of social media, respondents in the OccupyMedia! Survey[1] said that they allow them to reach a broad public and to protect themselves from the police:

- "As much as I wish that occupy would keep away from a media such as Facebook it got the advantage that it can reach out to lots of people that […] [are] otherwise hard to reach out to" (#20).
- "All of these social media […] Facebook, Twitter etc. helps spread the word but I think the biggest achievement is Livestream: those of us who watch or participate in change can inform other streamers of actions, police or protest moving from one place […] to another. That **<2>** saved many streamers from getting hurt or less arrests" (#36).

At the same time, the respondents identified risks of the use of commercial social media:
- "Facebook is generally exploitative, and controls the output of Facebook posts, the frequency they are seen by other people. It's a disaster and we shouldn't use it at all. But we still do" (#28).

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[1] The data collection for the OccupyMedia Survey! took place from November 6th, 2012, until February 20th, 2013. I conducted the research as online survey. Its aim was to find out more about how Occupy activists use social media and what opportunities and risks of social media they see. The survey resulted in a dataset with N=429 respondents.

- "There have been occasions where the police seemed to have knowledge that was only shared in a private group and/or text messages and face-to-face" (#55).
- "Events for protests that were created on Facebook, but not organised IRL [in real life]. Many 'participants' in calls for protests on Facebook, but at least 70% of them [don't] […] show up at the actual demonstration" (#74).
- "Twitter has been willing to turn over protestors tweets to authorities which is a big concern" (#84)
- "Censorship of content by YouTube and email deletions on Gmail" (#103)
- "Yes, my Twitter account was subpoena'd, for tweeting a hashtag. The supboena was dropped in court" (#238)
- "Facebook = Tracebook" (#203)

This example indicates that social media seems to be embedded into asymmetric power structures (for a detailed discussion see also Fuchs 2014a, b): It has the potential to support protest mobilisation and protest communication. At the same time using social media generates data traces of activists' communications and movements, which makes it easier for corporate Internet platforms and the police to monitor, control, censor, infiltrate political movements. This contradictory character of media power can only be understood by using critical theory for conceptualising and analysing power relations, its realities, asymmetries, potentials, and struggles.

This chapter is a contribution to critically theorising media power in the age of social media. It first categorises different notions of power (section 2), introduces a dialectical notion of media power (section 3), discusses the dialectics of social media power (section 4), and draws some conclusions about the need for a dialectical and critical theory of the media and society (section 5).

2. Three Theoretical Concepts of Power

There are objective, subjective, and dialectical concepts of power and consider the latter approaches as integrating and synthesizing the former two.

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	Human Subjects	Objects
Objectivism		Power is located in coercive institutions that realize the particular will of a group by commanding and sanctioning other groups and individuals.
Subjectivism	Power is a productive, transformative human capacity that is immanent in the human body and all social relationships.	
Subject-Object-Dialectic	Power is a dialectical process, in which human actors enter social relationships that are to certain degrees competitive and co-operative in order to reach decisions so that decision-oriented structures emerge and are reproduced that enable and constrain further decision-oriented social practices. Power is conceived as a dynamic process that connects power structures and power practices, objects and subjects of power.	

Table 1: Three concepts of power

2.1. Objective Concepts of Power

The power to take and influence collective decisions is a central aspect of politics. There are on the one hand objective concepts of power that consider it as being localized in institutions and structures such as nation states, parliaments, ministries, public administration bodies, coercive state apparatuses such as police, military, law, the judicial system, the prison system, and secret services that coercively assert the will of certain groups against the will of others. A classical definition of power that stands in this objectivist tradition is the one of Max Weber who sees it as the "chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber 1972, 926). He defines domination as "probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of people" (Weber 1972, 212). Weber's definition implies that power is something that is necessarily coercively defended by one group against other groups. This also means an unbridgeable gap and relationship of domination between the powerful and the powerless. The difference between power and domination in Weber's theory is vague; both seem to be related to sanctions, struggle, disciplines, commands and coercion. For Weber power is something that is exerted on someone against his own will.

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Jürgen Habermas (1986)[2] has given a definition of power that is similar to the one of Weber. For Habermas power has to do with the realization of collective goals, means of coercion, symbols of power and status, decision-making authorities, disadvantages, power of definition, counter-power, organization, and legitimation (Habermas 1981, 400-407).

For Niklas Luhmann power is a symbolically generalized medium of communication that regulates and overcomes contingency and increases the possibility of selections in communication processes (Luhmann 1975, 2000). In a first general sense Luhmann's definition of power as ability to act effectively reminds one of Gidden's definition and as action that affects other actions it seems close to Foucault (Luhmann 2000: 39). But Luhmann continues that such a definition is too broad because it would imply that all simple activities like brushing one's teeth would have to do with power. Hence in a narrower definition he sees power as the achievement of inducing someone to act in a certain way that he wouldn't act normally and only does so due to the announcement of possible sanctions (ibid.). Power would always be connected to influence that is generated by communicating possible (positive or negative) sanctions. Political power would be based on negative sanctions, threats, and coercion. Physical violence would be the best means of threatening someone and for generating power; it would be closely connected to the state system (55). Power would never include consensus, the life-world wouldn't as assumed by Habermas be a pool of consensus (53f, 76). Consensus would make the use of power superfluous.

Luhmann analyzes power as something necessarily coercive and hence his concept is closer to Weber than to Foucault and Giddens. His assumptions imply that organisations that are largely based on consensus and co-operation are powerless organisations. Collective modes of organisation are an expression of a certain degree of power that can be employed in order to achieve goals. If there is a low level of conflict in an organisation and all actors can achieve their goals by co-operating and achieving consensus by dialogue, neither they nor their organisation are powerless, but can be considered as an expression of co-operative modes of power. Tooth brushing and other activities don't have much to do with power not because conflict and coercion are missing, but because they are simple individual activities, whereas power occurs only in social relationships and situations that require collective decisions.

2.2. Subjective Concepts of Power

Opposed to such objective concepts of power that stress repressive institutions, Foucault has asked: "If power were never anything but repressive if it never did anything but say no, do you really think we should manage to obey it?" (Foucault 1980, 119). He stressed a productive, creative aspect of power: Power "runs through, and it produces things, it induces pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse; <5> it must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault 1980, 119). "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces, it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault 1977, 250).

Foucault (1977, 1980, 1982) pointed out that power is not an abstract entity "out there", it is not something that one cannot know or pinpoint. His work made clear that power doesn't exist outside of the human being, but operates in and through the human body and within

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[2] "Power means every chance within a social relationship to assert one's will even against opposition" (Habermas 1986, 74).

daily routines and actions. Foucault opposed the idea that power is only located in dominating classes and the state and that it is something that others don't have and is withheld from them. Power would have a networked character that affects all social relationships. Foucault never gave a definition of power, only one of power relations: "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. [...] Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. What defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or future" (Foucault 1982, 219f). For Foucault power is productive and produces knowledge. The exercise of power may need violence, but violence for Foucault is not inherent in a power relation[3]. A power relation would be an action that influences another action and determines a field of possibility for it. In this field, ways of resistance and counteraction would always be present – "there are no relations of power without resistance" (Foucault 1980, 142).

With Foucault the concept of power took a subjective turn, he pointed out that power is related to people's bodies, sexuality, consciousness, and everyday life. Foucault in no way was optimistic that oppressed individuals and groups can produce counter-power and resistance. He more thought that modern society is so oppressive that it even reaches the drives and sentiments of humans. But one can interpret Foucault's assumptions that power is productive and that it is immanent in all social relationships in a way that means that all oppressed groups and individuals have power potentials as social groups that they can make use of in order to change their situation in society. Power doesn't exist outside of social relationships and isn't a thing that is simply controlled by some groups that try **<6>** to withhold it from others; it is produced and reproduced in and through agency.

Also Anthony Giddens has elaborated a rather subjective concept related to the notion of human agency. Giddens defines power as "'transformative capacity', the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to alter them" (Giddens 1985, 7), as the "capability to effectively decide about courses of events, even where others might contest such decisions" (Giddens 1985, 9). For Giddens power is related to (allocative and authoritative) resources, to material facilities and means of control. Power is characteristic for all social relationships, it "is routinely involved in the instantiation of social practices" and is "operating in and through human action" (Giddens 1981, 49f). For Giddens power is related to the command over economic resources and humans: "Allocative resources refer to capabilities – or, more accurately, to forms of transformative capacity – generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena. Authorative resources refer to types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors" (Giddens 1984, 33).

Foucault argues that power is not necessarily something repressive and coercive. Boh Foucault and Giddens point out that it operates in and through social relationships and on the foundation of daily routines. Power stems from the creative political relationships of human beings. They are both subjects and objects of power. The problem of Foucault's work is that his concept of power is very diffuse. He doesn't give a clear definition. Giddens defines power in a more concrete way in relationship to collective decisions and resources. For him the political realm of society has to do with the "capability of marshalling authoritative

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[3] "In itself the exercise of power is not violence; nor is it a consent which, implicitly, is renewable. It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions: it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (Foucault 1982, 220).

resources or what I shall call administrative power" (Giddens 1985, 19). This would always include control, surveillance, domination, sanctions, physical violence and threats of the use of violence. Giddens thereby naturalizes relationships of domination, coercion and heteronomy as fundamental aspects of all social systems and societies. But historical and archaeological studies show that there were cultures such as the Minoan one that were remarkably peaceful. One can imagine social systems and societies that are largely based on co-operation instead of domination, violence, and coercion. It is therefore an unrealistically defeatist position when Giddens (1984) argues that the end of domination is an unrealistic goal and vision. Suggesting that political power is always repressive and dominative results in an unclear differentiation between power and domination (as it also can be found in the works of Max Weber).

2.3. A Dialectical Concept of Power

Synthesizing objective and subjective approaches allows conceiving power as a dynamic process that includes power practices and power structures. Power is the disposition over means required to influence processes and decisions in one's own interest. Domination refers to the disposition over means of coercion that are employed for influencing others, processes, and decisions. Means of power are economic resources (money, means of production, commodities), social relationships, human activities, capabilities, and knowledge. This means that what Pierre Bourdieu (1986a, b) has termed economic, political, and cultural capital are structures that allow those individuals and groups who control a certain share of these capital types to influence decisions to certain degrees (see Fuchs 2003a).

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Power structures are not confined to politics, there are economic, political and cultural power: property, collective decision-making power, and definition power. Economic power is a disposition over property, political power the capacity to influence decisions that are binding for all, and cultural power the capacity to shape definitions, meanings, interpretations, norms and values. Table 2 provides an overview of the three dimensions of power structures. Power is relational. It is a social relation, in which individuals or groups control specific shares of a specific structure.

Dimension of society	Definition of power	Structures of power in modern society
Economy	Control of use-values and resources that are produced, distributed and consumed.	Control of money and capital.
Politics	Influence on collective decisions that determine aspects of the lives of humans in certain communities and social systems.	Control of governments, bureaucratic state institutions, parliament, military, police, parties, lobby groups, civil society groups, etc.
Culture	Definition of moral values and meaning that shape what is considered as important, reputable	Control of structures that define meaning and moral values in society (e.g. universities, religious groups, intellectual circles, opinion making groups, etc).

| | and worthy in society. | |

Table 2.: Three forms of power structures

Objective power structures enable and constrain further (actual or potential) power struggles and practices that aim at changing the distribution of power in social systems and society. Power has both a subjective and an objective level that produce each other mutually. It is a permanent dynamic production process in which actors enter relations, conflicts and discourse in order to constitute, change, and reproduce collective structures that enable and constrain further social practices, etc. Power structures emerge or are reproduced dynamically from social power practices that influence further practices and relations so that existing power structures are reproduced, there is the potential for the emergence of new ones emerge, etc. (cf. figure 1, for a more detailed discussion cf. Fuchs 2003b). There are different enabling and constraining degrees of power structures ranging from **<8>** very open structures that allow a maximum of freedom and rights (including the right to welfare and social security, the right to participation, leisure, and self-expression, the guarantee of the realization of human rights for all, freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and belief, etc.) to very closed coercive structures that minimise freedom and rights.
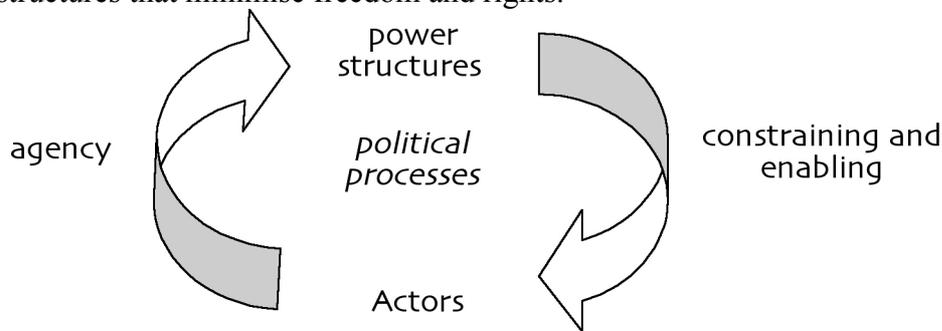

Figure 1: Power as dynamic process

Power structures take on a specific form in modern society – the capital form. Modern society is a capitalist society. For Marx, capital is self-expanding value and accumulation is its inherent feature. Capital needs to permanently increase, otherwise companies, branches, industries or entire economies enter phases of crisis. Capitalism is therefore a dynamic and inherently expansive system, which has implications for the exploitation of nature, centralisation, concentration, uneven development, imperialism, military conflicts, the creation of milieus of unpaid and highly exploited labour, the destruction of nature and the depletion of natural resources, etc. "The employment of surplus-value as capital, or its reconversion into capital, is called accumulation of capital" (Marx 1867, 725). The capitalist "shares with the miser an absolute drive towards self-enrichment. But what appears in the miser as the mania of an individual is in the capitalist the effect of a social mechanism in which he is merely a cog. Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes it necessary constantly to increase the amount of capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition subordinates every individual capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production, as external and coercive laws. It compels him to keep extending his capital, so as to preserve it, and he can only extend it by means of progressive accumulation" (Marx 1867, 739). Capitalism is a society that is grounded in and driven by the accumulation of capital.

The drive to accumulate is in contemporary society not limited to money capital. We also find the accumulation imperative in the accumulation of political decision power and the accumulation of cultural distinction, reputation and definition power. Capitalism is not a

purely economic system, but rather a society, in which the subsystems are driven by the accumulation imperative. Accumulation logic is multidimensional and shapes the modern **<9>** economy, politics, culture, private life, everyday life and the modern humans' relationship to nature. The subsystems of modern society have their own specific forms of the accumulation logic, which means that they all have their own specific economies of production, circulation and distribution of power. Power takes on economic, political and cultural forms. Pierre Bourdieu (1986a, b) has generalised the concepts of capital and accumulation and describes capitalism as a class system based on the accumulation of economic, political and cultural capital.

Human actors and groups in modern society have a certain share of the totally available capital. These structures are in modern society organised in such a way that humans compete for accumulating capital shares at the expense of others. This results in social and symbolic power struggles that are an expression of asymmetrical distributions of power. Power struggles organised in the form of e.g. elections, wars, industrial conflict, or everyday disputes produce and reproduce objective power structures and institutions such as laws, decision-making bodies, the state system, nation states, parliaments, ministries, bureaucracies, courts, public offices, departments, public administration bodies, coercive state apparatuses such as police, military, law, the judicial system, the prison system, secret services, etc. These structures are influenced and controlled by different social groups to certain degrees according to the outcome of power struggles.

Power and politics do not necessarily involve leadership as suggested by Max Weber[4]. Power can be distributed in different forms in social systems. Domination always includes sanctions, repression, threats of violence, and an asymmetric distribution of power. In political relationships it is determined how power is constituted, distributed, allocated, and disposed. Highly co-operative and inclusive social systems that are characterised by solidarity and altruism are not systems without power, but systems with a rather symmetrical distribution of power and a minimization of domination. **<10>** Power can be distributed in different manners: In more symmetrical distributions actors can influence the decisions which affect them to a large degree, in an asymmetrical distribution of power certain actors control resources in such a way that they can influence decisions in their own sense and circumvent the possibility that others can also influence these decisions. Domination is based on asymmetrical distributions of power, but it means more than that, it also includes means of coercion that are employed in order to influence others, processes and decisions in ones own sense. Domination always includes sanctions, repression, threats of violence, and an asymmetric distribution of power. It is a coercive, institutionalized social relationship of power. Domination cannot be distributed in a symmetrical manner. It always involves an asymmetrical distribution of resources and possibilities. It necessarily is exerted on someone against his will. Coercive means are an expression of the possibility of disciplines, sanctions, and repression. Domination means that these coercive means exist along with the threat of being used against someone or certain groups. Domination can also be found where these means are not directly employed, but only exist as a means of threat.

Power does not imply violence, whereas domination does. Power is potentially a violent social relation, but not necessarily. Domination in contrast implies the existence of an asymmetrical power relation and the use of violence in this relation. But what is violence? Johan Galtung (1990, 292) defines violence in contrast as "avoidable insults to basic human

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[4] Politics is for Weber (2008, 155f) "leadership, or the influence exerted on the leadership, of a political association".

needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible" (Galtung 1990, 292). Violence can according to Galtung (1990) be divided into three principal forms: direct violence (through physical intervention; an event), structural violence (through state or organizational mandate; a process), and cultural violence (dehumanizing or otherwise exclusionary representations; an invariance). This means that in exerting violence one can physically coerce somebody (physical violence), exclude him/her from access to vital resources (structural violence) or manipulate his/her mind or ruin his/her reputation (ideological violence). Violence not only exists if it is actually exerted, but also if it is only a threat: "Threats of violence are also violence" (Galtung 1990, 292). The three forms of violence are forms of how people or groups try to accumulate different forms of power.

Different forms of violence can be exerted in order to accumulate different forms of power. In modern society, economic, political and cultural power can be accumulated and tend to be asymmetrically distributed. The logic of accumulation (getting more and more of something) is vital for modern society. It has its origins in the capitalist economy. But it also shapes the logic of modern politics and culture that are focused on the accumulation of political and cultural power. Capitalism is therefore not just an economic system, but also a form of society. Physical, structural and ideological violence can be used in any of the three dimensions/fields of modern society for trying to accumulate power at the expense of others. Many structures of modern society are based on specific forms of violence that help accumulating power. For example a corporation makes use of the structural violence of the market and private property in order to accumulate capital. Or the state uses of the monopoly of physical violence **<11>** and the institutional power of government institutions in order to make collective decisions.

Power exists in all situations where humans enter social relationships and have to act in order to transform structures by taking decisions of how to act. In this sense it can be considered as decision-oriented capacity to act that produces structures that in a recursive and self-referential loop enable and constrain further practices. For transforming structures and taking decisions humans depend on each other and on resources, depending on how these relationships are organised (symmetrically vs. asymmetrically, i.e. all control resources and humans together in self-managed processes or an elite controls resources and humans) different distributions of power are possible. Asymmetrical distributions of power are characteristic for coercive systems, but coercive power is not something fixed. Oppressed groups can challenge coercion by realizing the power potential that they as collective actor comprised of human capacities possess.

Counter-action and counter-power is not always realistic and achievable, but it is at least always a possibility of action that under certain circumstances can result in liberation from domination. Anthony Giddens speaks in this context of the dialectic of control: "All strategies of control employed by superordinate individuals or groups call forth counter-strategies on the part of the subordinates. […] To be an agent is to be able to make a difference to the world, and to be able to make a difference is to have power (where power means transformative capacity)" (Giddens 1985, 10f). For Giddens, counter-power is however not a potential, but an automatism ("calls forth"). He does not see that specific interests, violence and ideology can forestall change and cement the existence of domination. There is no guarantee that humans who are oppressed see the need for change and engage in building counter-power. Counter-power is always a potential, but never a necessity. Counter-power does not automatically result from domination. It is a potential for changing the social world.

Power is institutionalised and objectified in structures. At the same time, structures need to be

reproduced in order to exist continuously. Any system of power, be it a fascist state, a slave system, a company that highly exploits its workers or a patriarchal family structure, is upheld by the practices that are organised within it. Those oppressed by asymmetric power structures must engage in practices that reproduce these structures in order for them to continue to exist: the citizens obey the laws of the fascist state, the slave and the worker in the company produce profits for the slave-master and the capitalist day-in day-out, the wife continues to have sex with the husband who beats her up, etc. These practices are what Gramsci calls hegemony. Hegemony means "an active and voluntary (free) consent" (Gramsci 1971, 271). But why do oppressed people not always resist their oppressor? It is partly out of fear of violence or getting killed, fear that others may be harmed to, or the ideological belief that the system is good the way it is, that it could be worse, or that there is no alterna- <2> tive. Even if there is hegemony, there is always the potential for people to resist, build counter-power and try to overthrow the dominant structures of power. Often this is however difficult and they are confronted with a lack of resources, motivation, courage, and organisation. Resistance is therefore a structurally difficult, but morally important form of work.

Marx stresses the object-subject dialectic of power in his analyses of French politics. He stresses on the one hand the objective power dimension of dominative systems: He Marx points out how the French bourgeoisie ruled over the working class with the help of violence, censorship, surveillance, military rule, ideological education. Marx says that the bourgeoisie rules by the sword: "It apotheosised the sword; the sword rules it. It destroyed the revolutionary press; its own press has been destroyed. It placed popular meetings under police supervision; its salons are under the super- vision of the police. It disbanded the democratic National Guards; its own National Guard is disbanded. It imposed a state of siege; a state of siege is imposed upon it. It sup- planted the juries by military commissions; its juries are supplanted by military commissions. It subjected public education to the sway of the priests; the priests subject it to their own education. It transported people without trial; it is being transported without trial" (Marx 1852, 101f). So power has for Marx an objective-structural dimension. Those in power "repressed every stirring in society by means of the state power; every stirring in its society is suppressed by means of the state power" (Marx 1852, 102).

A revolutionary or protest movement challenges existing power structures. Its constitution and practices are a form of power of the people in itself. Therefore Marx describes social struggles as "struggle between the two powers" (Marx 1852, 62) and a "[w]ar between the two powers" (Marx 1852, 75). Power for Marx is something that is exerted by ruling groups, individuals and classes, but is not merely located in institutions, but also something that can be built and conquered in social struggles. Marx (1852, 81) therefore also speaks of opporessed people conquering the control of power. Power is distributed in different ways and this distribution can be changed by social struggles. Marx described that in France under Louis Philippe (French King from 1830-1848) the "commercial bourgeoisie" held "the lion's share of power" (Marx 1852, 88). This formulation implies that power is distributed and redistributable.

In his analysis of the Paris Commune (1871), Marx argues that a revolutionary movement that takes over state power has to transform this power. He sees revolution as a transformation of power structures and a change in the distribution of power: "But the working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready-made state machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation" (Marx 1871, 533). In the Paris Commune, the revolutionaries' appropriation of power – its "break[s] with the modern state power <13> (Marx 1871, 333) – resulted in the transformation of administrative, educational, judicial, repressive and other state institutions:

"Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune. Having once got rid of the standing army and the police – the physical force elements of the old government – the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the 'parson-power', by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles. The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it. The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subserviency to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable" (Marx 1871, 331f).

Marx describes that a revolutionary movement not just has the power to transform political structures, but also economic ones: "Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labor of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labor. But this is communism, "impossible" communism!" (Marx 1871, 335).

Marx describes power as a dialectic of structures and practices: The French regime used state power to oppress citizens and workers economically and politically. The revolutionary movement broke in 1871 with the hegemonic reproduction of these power structures and seized power. It then started to transform the existing power structures by making them democratic.

In modern society, the two most important dimensions of institutionalised power are capital and the state. Framed more generally, this is the question of how the economy and the state are related. Marx says in this context that "state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism" (Marx 1871, 329). And: "And yet the state power is not suspended in midair. Bonaparte represents a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding peasants" (Marx 1852, 105). The question is what it means that state power represents class. It does not mean that capitalists directly rule, run and control the state. But how can we best think **<14>** about this relationship of capital and the state?

The state is not a homogenous apparatus or machine of the ruling class for dominating the ruled class, but a field of power forces. First, there are factions of the capitalist class (e.g. transnational corporations, small and medium enterprises, finance capital, commercial capital, manufacturing capital, cultural capital etc) that compete for shares of capital and power and therefore have to a certain degree conflicting interests. Second, although there are overlaps of the capitalist class and the political elite (for example when managers become politicians or bureaucrats become consultants for companies or when private-public-partnerships are established as part of neoliberal governance systems), their activities, personnel and interests are not co-extensive. The differentiation of the state and the capitalist economy in modern society has also brought about a division of labour between capitalists and politicians.
Third, the state's class power can be challenged by left-wing political movements that want to establish a transitory state that drives back capitalist interests and advances welfare and social

benefits for all. It is of course doubtful in this context that a socialist state can exist in a capitalist society and that state power is necessary in all forms of society, but at the same time progressive movements' goal to conquer state power is not necessarily a social democratic-reformist strategy, but can be based on politics of radical reformism that are politically immanent and transcendental at the same time. The state is however not just challenged and reproduced by political parties, but also by social movements organised in civil society.

Given these complexities and contradictions of the state, it can only be conceived as a contradictory force field with temporal unity – a power bloc – between conflicting interests that form political alliances. The state is an "institutional crystallization", "the material condensation of a relationship of forces", "a strategic field and process of intersecting power networks, which both articulate and exhibit mutual contradictions and displacements" (Poulantzas 1980, 136). The state does not directly map or mirror the interests of the capitalist class, but rather crystallizes the complexities of the class structure in contradictory ways. It is precisely by the articulation of complex factions and oppositions through which dominant interests are transposed from economic power into state power and in a dialectical reversal back from state power to economic power. The "state crystallizes the relations <15> of production and class relations. The modern political state does not translate the 'interests' of the dominant classes at the political level, but the relationship between those interests and the interests ofthe dominated classes - which means that it precisely constitutes the 'political' expression of the interests of the dominant classes" (Poulantzas 2008, 80).

3. Media, Communication and Power

When discussing media and communication power, Manuel Castells' approach has in recent years received most attention.

The task that Manuel Castells has set himself for his book *Comunication Power*, is to suggest answers to the question: "where does power lie in the global network society?" (Castells 2009, 42). Castells defines communication power as a fourfold form of power characteristic for the network society: networking power, network power, networked power, network-making power (Castells 2009, 42-47, 418-420). Network-making power is for Castells the "paramount form of power in the network society" (Castells 2009, 47). It is held and exercised by programmers and switchers. Programmers have the power "to constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network". Switchers have the power "to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation" (Castells 2009, 45). Communication power is for Castells the power to create, maintain and shape networks by communication. He reduces the power of the media and communication thereby to the cultural level – the production, and distribution and interpretation of information in social relations.

Castells (2009, 10) defines power in a Weber-inspired way as "the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values" (p. 10). Power is associated with coercion, domination, violence or potential violence, and asymmetry. He refers to the power concepts of Foucault, Weber, and Habermas and argues that he builds on Giddens' structuration theory. However, as section 2 showed, Giddens conceives power in a completely different way, a way that is neither mentioned nor discussed by Castells. For Giddens, power is s transformative capacity in all social relationships.

In Giddens structuration theory, power is not necessarily coercive, violent, and asymmetrically distributed. Therefore it becomes possible to conceive of and analyse situations and social systems, in which power is more symmetrically distributed, for example situations and systems of participatory democracy. Power as transformative capacity seems indeed to be a fundamental aspect of all societies. This also means that there is a huge difference between Castells' approach and Giddens' structuration theory, which as such is not problematic, but should also be explicated, especially because Castells (2009, 14) says that he builds on Giddens' structuration theory (p. 14), which he in fact does not. The problem with Castells' notion of power is that he sees coercive, violent, dominative power relationships as "the foundational relations of society throughout history, geography, <16> and cultures" (Castells 2009, 9). Such power is for him "the most fundamental process in society" (Castells 2009, 10). Furthermore, Castells (2009, 13) dismisses the "naïve image of a reconciled human community, a normative utopia that is belied by historical observation".

Is it really likely that all history of humankind and that all social situations and systems, in which we live, are always and necessarily shaped by power struggles, coercion, violence, and domination? Relationships of love, intimacy, and affection are in modern society unfortunately often characterized by violence and coercion and are therefore frequently (in Castells' terms) power relationships. But isn't love a prototypical phenomenon, where many people experience feelings and actions that negate violence, domination, and coercion? Isn't the phenomenon of altruism in love the practical falsification of the claim that coercive power is the most fundamental process in society? Not coercive power, but co-operation is the most fundamental process in society (Fuchs 2008, 31-34, 40-58). It is possible to create social systems without coercive power (in Castells' terms) or with a symmetric distribution of power (in Giddens' terminology). Conceiving power as violent coercion poses the danger of naturalising and fetishising coercion and violent struggles as necessary and therefore not historical qualities of society. The problematic ideological-theoretical implication is that in the final instance war must exist in all societies and a state of peace is dismissed and considered as being categorically impossible. Castells surely does not share this implication, as his analysis of communication power in the Iraq war shows.

The task of Castells' book *Communication Power* is to "advance the construction of a grounded theory of power in the network society" (Castells 2009, 5). Castells does not want to place himself in theoretical debates, he bases his approach on "a selective reading of power theories" (Castells 2009, 6), does not want to write books about books (Castells 2009, 6; Castells 2010, 25), and thinks that social theory books are contributing to the deforestation of the planet (Castells 2009, 6), which is just another expression for saying that they are unimportant and not worth the paper they are printed on. Lacking grounding in social theory, Castells cannot explain why he uses a certain definition of power and not another one. His lack of engagement with social theory results in a fetishisation of domination as endless and natural social phenomenon.

John B. Thompson (1995) distinguishes four forms of power (see table 3). The problem of Thompson's approach is that the media's power is reduced to the symbolic dimension and that the relationship of violence and power is unclear. Symbolic power is an important dimension of the media: the media not only have form, <17> but also communicate content to the public, which allows attempts to influence the minds of the members of the public. But ideology is not the only aspect of the media, the media are rather a terrain where different forms of power and power struggles manifest themselves: the media have specific structures of private or public ownership that tend to be concentrated. There are attempts to politically control and influence the media and the media often have political roles in elections, social

movement struggles, etc. Violence is a frequent topic in media content. The media are not just a realm of symbolic power, but rather material and symbolic spaces, where structures and contradictions of economic, political, coercive and symbolic power manifest themselves. It is unclear why Thompson defines violence as a separate form of power. He reduces violence to direct physical violence, exerted for example if one kills or beats somebody. He does not see, as Galtung (1990) does, that there are ideological forms of violence. Nick Couldry (2002, 4) defines media power as "the concentration in media institutions of the symbolic power of 'constructing reality'". Like Thompson's definition of power, also the one given by Couldry focuses on the symbolic and cultural dimension of the media.

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Type of power	Definition	Resources	Institutions
Economic power	"Economic power stems from human productive activity, that is, activity concerned with the provision of the means of subsistence through the extraction of raw materials and their transformation into goods which can be consumed or exchanged in a market" (14).	Material and financial resources	Economic institutions
Political power	Political power "stems from the activity of coordinating individuals and regulating the patterns of their interaction" (14).	Authority	Political institutions (e.g. states)
Coercive power	"Coercive power involves the use, or threatened use, of physical force to subdue or conquer an opponent" (15).	Physical and armed force	Coercive institutions (military, police, carceral institutions, etc)
Symbolic power	Symbolic power is the "capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and indeed to create events, by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms" (17)	Means of information and communication	Cultural institutions (church, schools, universities, media, etc).

Table 3: John B. Thompson's four forms of power (based on Thompson 1995, 12-18)

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Media power is not cultural, superstructural, ideational. It is a multidimensional form of economic, political and cultural power. The media are not just cultural, they also have a political economy that frames the production, diffusion and interpretation of information. James Curran (2002, chapter 5) has identified 11 dimensions of media power and 7 dimensions of media counter-power. I have classified these dimensions according to the three dimensions of media power (see table 4): economic media power, political media power and cultural media power. Curran stresses that media power is not just symbolic, but multidimensional. The distinction of three realms of society (economy, politics, culture) allows us to classify forms of media power (table 4). Curran stresses the contradictory character of contemporary media: There are "eleven main factors that encourage the media to support dominant power interests" (Curran 2002, 148), but "the media are also subject to countervailing pressures which can pull potentially in the other direction" (Curran 2002, 151).

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Dimension of media power	Forms of media power	Forms of media counter-power
Economic media power	high entry and operation costs; media concentration; private media ownership; influence of companies on the media via advertising; market pressure to produce homogenous (often uncritical) content with wide appeal; content that appeals to wealthy consumers; the unequal distribution of economic resources (money) allows economic elites more influence on and control of the media	Public media, alternative grassroots media, public funding for alternative media; staff power (e.g. critical journalism, investigative reporting); consumer power (e.g. by support of alternative media in the form of donations)
Political media power	state censorship of the media; public relations of large (political and economic organisations) results in bureaucratic lobbying apparatus that aims to influence the media; the unequal distribution of political resources (influence,	Media regulation that secures quality, fair reporting, diversity, freedom of expression, assembly and opinion; alternative news sources state redistribution of resources from the more

	decision power, political relations) allows economic elites more influence on and control of the media	powerful to the less powerful
Cultural media power	focus on content covering prestige institutions, celebrities and others who have high reputation; dominant ideologies influence dominant media to a certain degree; the unequal distribution of cultural resources (reputation, prestige) allows economic elites more influence on and control of the media	creation of counter-organisations that develop counter-discourses and operate their own media

Table 4: Power and counter-power in the media (based on: Curran 2002, chapter 5)

<21>

The systematic typology of media power that is based on Curran's approach shows that modern media can best be viewed dialectically: they are subject to elite control, but have potentials for acting as and being influenced by counter-powers that question elite control. This form of struggle is a potential, which means that it does not automatically arise. The power of dominant and alternative media tends to be distributed unequally (see: Sandoval and Fuchs 2010, Fuchs 2010): alternative media are often facing resource inequalities and have to exist based on precarious labour and resource precariousness.

4. Social Media and Power

Discussions about "social media" such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or Weibo have in recent years often been discussions about power. The question in such debates is often: What's the power of social media? This question is wrongly posed and tends to imply that technological system in a linear and deterministic manner have specific one-dimensional implications for society. The major claim of management gurus, the tabloid press, certain politicians, observers and one-dimensional scholars has been that social media empowers citizens, consumers, has resulted in political revolutions, and makes society, the economy and culture more democratic. Conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan's (2009) claimed that the "revolution will be twittered" in the context of the 2009 Iran protests. In light of the Arab Spring, there was talk about a "revolution 2.0" (Ghonim 2012). *Foreign Policy Magazine* titled an article "The revolution will be tweeted"[5] and the *New York Times* wrote that the "Egyptian revolution began on Twitter"[6]. In the scholarly world academics such as Manuel Castells (2012, 229) claimed that the "networked movements of our time are largely based on the Internet". Clay Shirky argues that social media "will result in a net improvement for democracy" (Gladwell and Shirky 2011, 154). Concerning the economic realm, management gurus Tapscott and Williams (2007, 15) argue that social media result in "a new economic

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[5] The Revolution will be tweeted. *Foreign Policy Online*. June 20, 2011. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/20/the_revolution_will_be_tweeted#sthash.fzgJPMdN.dpbs
[6] Spring awakening. How an Egyptian revolution began on Facebook. *New York Times Online*. February 17, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

democracy […] in which we all have a lead role". Henry Jenkins sees social media in context of the development that "the Web has become a site of consumer participation" (Jenkins 2008, 137).

Authors sceptical of such claims have stressed that social media are in contemporary society embedded into structures of control and domination. Malcolm Gladwell writes that Facebook and Twitter activism only succeed in situations that do not require "to make a real sacrifice" (Gladwell 2010, 47), such as registering in a bone-marrow database or getting back a stolen phone. "The evangelists of social media", such as Clay Shirky, "seem to believe that a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend and that signing up for a donor registry in Silicon Valley today is activism in the same sense as sitting at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960" (Gladwell 2010, 46). Social media would "make it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact" (Gladwell 2010, 49). Social media "are not a natural enemy of the status quo" and "are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient" (Gladwell 2010, 49).

Evgeny Morozov (2010) argues that the notion of "Twitter revolution" is based on a belief in cyber-utopianism – "a naive belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside" (Morozov 2010, xiii) that combined with Internet-centrism forms a techno-deterministic ideology. Technological solutionism is recasting "all complex social situations either as neatly defined problems with definite, computable solutions or as transparent and self-evident processes that can be easily optimized – if only the right algorithms are in place". The consequence of solutionism would be the risk to create "unexpected consequences that could eventually cause more damage than the problems they seek <22> to address". Morozov shows that solutionism is a typical ideology of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and intellectuals who glorify the Internet as being the solution to societal problems or what is seen as societal problems and may in fact not be problems at all. Thinkers that Morozov criticizes for being Internet centrists are on the one hand the likes of Eric Schmidt (Google) and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) and on the other hand intellectuals such as Yochai Benkler, Nicholas Carr, Jeff Jarvis, Kevin Kelly, Lawrence Lessig, Clay Shirky, Don Tapscott, Jonathan Zittrain. Internet-centrism and technological solutionism "impoverish and infantilize our public debate" (Morozov 2013, 43).

Social or other media neither result in positive or negative consequences. They do not act. They do not make society. They do not have one-dimensional impacts. Media are systems that are in a complex manner embedded into antagonistic economic, political and cultural power structures that are antagonistic.

Social media in contemporary society are shaped by structures of economic, political and cultural power:
• Social media have specific ownership structures. If social media's economic power is asymmetrically distributed, then a private class owns social media. If it is more symmetrically distributed, then a collective of users or all people own social media.
• Social media have specific decision-making structures. If social media's political power is asymmetrically distributed, then a specific group controls decision-making. If it is more symmetrically distributed, then all users or all people in society can influence decision-making.
• Social media have specific mechanisms for the generation of reputation and popularity. If social media's cultural power is asymmetrically distributed, then the reputation and visibility of certain actors are in contrast to the attention and visibility given to others large. Social media can also act as conveyors of ideologies that misrepresent reality. If highly

visible actors communicate such ideologies, then it is likely that they have some effect. If cultural power is more symmetrically distributed, then all users have a significant degree of visibility and attention.

Social media are spaces, where media power and counter-power are played out. Dominant platforms such as Facebook, Google/YouTube and Twitter are privately owned and there are economic, political and ideological forms of media power at play: private ownership, concentration, advertising, the logic of consumption and entertainment, the high visibility of and attention given to elites and celebrities shape and filter communication on dominant social media platforms. At the same time dominant structures are questioned by phenomena such as file sharing, commons-based social media that are non-profit and non-commercial (e.g. Wikipedia, Diaspora*), social movements' use of social media for political purposes, the development of alternative social media, protests against the dominance of platforms like Google, protests and legal disputes over privacy violations, etc. Contemporary social media is a field of power struggles, in which dominant **<23>** actors command a large share of economic, political and ideological media power that can be challenged by alternative actors that have less resources, visibility and attention, but try to make best use of the unequal share of media power they are confronted with in order to fight against the dominant powers.

Social media optimism and pessimism assume that the Internet is the solution to society's problem and can perfect society and get rid of the existence of problems. Karl Marx (1867) used the term "fetishism" for the logic of assuming that things are more important than social relations between humans: Techno-optimism and -pessimism are forms of technological fetishism that sees an artefact as solution to human-made problems. Max Horkheimer (1947) spoke in this context of instrumental reason and Herbert Marcuse (1941/1998) of technological rationality: instrumental/technological rationality assumes that society function like machines, are fully controllable and programmable like an algorithm. Internet fetishism assumes that society is a machine and functions like the Internet and that the Internet is therefore the solution for everything in society. Technological rationality wants to implement "dictates of the apparatus" that use a "framework of standardized performances" (Marcuse 1941/1998, 44): Google's standardized algorithms tell people what they should like, define as reality, where they should go, what they should consider important, etc. A tool like Google Maps can indeed be helpful for finding the way around, but it also allows Google (and as a consequence potentially also other companies and the police) to track your movements and to subject movements in space to the logic of advertising: targeted advertisements follow you wherever you take your mobile phone and present reality and what you should eat, drink, watch and like according to the logic of advertisers: "Expediency in terms of technological reason is, at the same time, expediency in terms of profitable efficiency" (Marcuse 1941/1998, 47). Marcuse (1941/1988, 41) warned that organising society according to technological rationality can result in fascism and said that Nazi Germany was ruled by "technical considerations of imperialistic efficiency and rationality".

It is no accident that Internet centrism and technological solutionism have become so predominant in the early stage of the 3rd millennium. After 9/11, policing has increasingly looked for security by algorithms in a world of high insecurity. It advances a fetishism of technology – the belief that crime and terrorism can be controlled by technology. Technology promises an easy fix to complex societal problems. 9/11 has resulted in "the misguided and socially disruptive attempts to identify terrorists and then predict their attacks" (Gandy 2009, 5). The world economic crisis that started in 2008 has added additional uncertainties and created a situation of high insecurity. 9/11 was indicative for a crisis of the hegemony of Western thought that was questioned by people and groups in Arab countries that put

religious ideology against Western liberal and capitalist ideology. The "war against terror", the security discourse and the intensification of surveillance resulted in a political crisis, in which war and terrorism tend to reinforce each other mutually, which results in a vicious cycle that intensifies hatred and conflict. Financialization and neoliberalism made capitalism more unjust (which constitutes a social crisis) and also crisis-prone, **<24>** which resulted in a new world economic crisis that started in 2008.

Capitalism faced a multidimensional crisis in and beyond the first decade of the 21st century. This crisis has further advanced ideologies of control and technological fixes that advance the ideology of the solvability of societal problems by technologies. Unemployment and lack of jobs? Social media will create them! Economic crisis? Invest in new Internet platforms and everything will be fine! Uprisings, revolutions and riots? All created by social media! It is no accident that ideological discourses like these proliferate in times of crisis: The Internet promises easy solutions to complex societal phenomena and contradictions intrinsic to capitalism, bureaucratic control and resulting inequalities.

Stuart Hall et al (1978) describe how a moral panic about street robbery ("mugging") developed in the UK in the 1970s. They argue that this panic must be seen in the context of the crisis of the mid-1970s. This crisis would have been a global crisis of capitalism (recession), a crisis of political apparatuses (such as ruling-class and working-class parties), a crisis of the state, and a crisis of hegemony and political legitimacy (Hall et al 1978, 317-319). In crises, people look for causes and answers. Ideology that wants to maintain the system does not engage with the systemic causes of crises, but rather displaces the causes ideologically. There is a "displacement effect": "the connection between the crisis and the way it is appropriated in the social experience of the majority – social anxiety – passes through a series of false 'resolutions'" (Hall et al 1978, 322). Technological solutionism and Internet centrism are contemporary ideological false resolutions in situations of global crisis.

Technological solutionism and Internet/social media fetishism constitute a permanent form of what Hall et al. (1978) called signification spirals: In a signification spiral, a threat is identified and it is argued that "more troubling times" will come "if no action is taken", which results in the "call for 'firm steps'" (Hall et al 1978, 223). If we do not act and use the latest Internet platform or app, the contemporary ideologues tell us, society cannot be saved and we will become the victims of criminals, terrorists, paedophiles, deviants, extremists and our own non-knowledge that can only be, as they want to tell us, technologically controlled. Today there are many Internet signification spirals, where the Internet is seen as cause of and/or solution to evils in the world.

In a moral panic, a "control culture" (such as police discourses about crime or terrorism) and a "signification culture" (like criminal hyperbole created by tabloid media) often act together (Hall et al 1978, 76). The media, just like the police, then act as "an apparatus of the control process itself – an 'ideological state apparatus'" (Hall et al 1978, 76). The Internet as a relatively new medium of information, communication and collaboration (Fuchs 2008) is inserted into contemporary moral panics in a different way than the mainstream media that simply tend to act as ideological control institutions. The Internet and social media act as arena of ideological projections of fears and hopes that are associated with moral panics – some argue that they are dangerous spaces that are used by terrorists, rioters, vandals and criminals and therefore needs to be policed with the help of Internet surveillance, whereas others argue that the Internet is a new space of political hope that is at the heart **<25>** of demonstrations, rebellions, protests and revolutions that struggle for more democracy. What both discourses share is a strong belief in the power of technology independently of society,

they mistake societal phenomena (crime, terror, crises, political transformations) to be caused and controllable by technology. But societal phenomena merely express themselves in communicative and technological spaces; technologies do not cause them. Technological determinism inscribes power into technology; it reduces power to a technologically manageable phenomenon and thereby neglects the interaction of technology and society. The Internet is not like the mainstream mass media an ideological actor, but rather an object of ideological signification in moral panics and moral euphoria.

5. Conclusion: The Need for a Dialectic and Critical Theory of Media and Society

A critical theory of media and technology is based on dialectical reasoning (see figure 2). This allows to see the causal relationship of media/technology and society as multidimensional and complex: a specific media/technology has multiple, at least two, potential effects on society and social systems that can co-exist or stand in contradiction to each other. Which potentials are realized is based on how society, interests, power structures, and struggles shape the design and usage of technology in multiple ways that are also potentially contradictory. Andrew Feenberg says in this context that Critical Theory "argues that technology is not a thing in the ordinary sense of the term, but an 'ambivalent' process of development suspended between different possibilities" (Feenberg 2002, 15).

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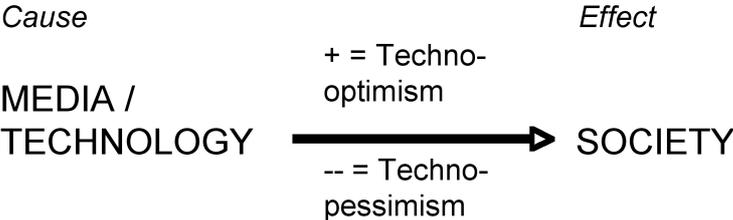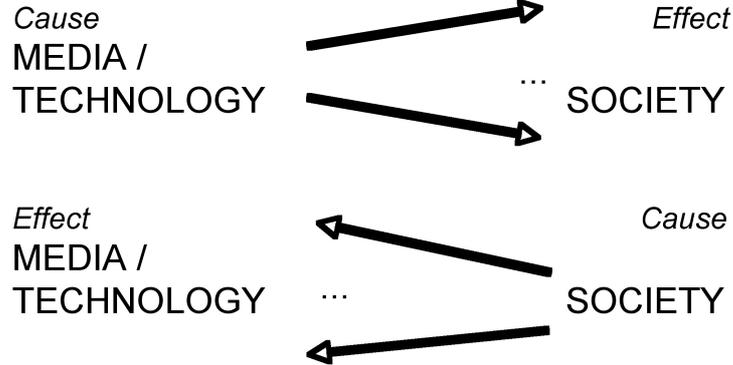
Figure 2: Two logics of the relationship between media technology and society

The revolution in Egypt was not a Twitter revolution, but related to the context of a highly stratified society. Real wages have been decreasing over twenty years, strikes were forbidden, there was repression against the political left and unions, the gap between the rich and the poor has been large, poverty constantly increased, wages in industry have been low, the global

economic crisis has resulted in mass lay-offs and a food crisis, Mubarak controlled together with the army Egyptian politics and bureaucracy since 1981, the illiteracy rate has been high, and there has been a contradiction between Islamic traditions and the values of modernization (Björklund 2011).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986b) distinguished between economic capital (money), political capital (power) and cultural capital (status, skills, educational attainments). Egypt was under Mubarak a society with a highly stratified class structure: there was a class that controlled the political-economic-military complex and accumulated economic, political and cultural capital at the expense of the masses of Egyptian people. The Egyptian revolution was a revolution against capitalism's multidimensional injustices, in which social media were used as a tool of information and organization, but were not the cause of the revolution.

The UK riots were not a Twitter mob, but related to the societal structure of the UK. The latter has a high level of income inequality, its Gini level was 32.4 in 2009 (0 means absolute equality, 100 absolute inequality), a level that is only topped by a few countries in Europe and that is comparable to the level of Greece (33.1) (data source: Eurostat). 17.3% of the UK population had a risk of living in poverty in 2009 (data source: Eurostat). In early 2011, the youth unemployment rate in the UK rose to 20.3%, the highest level since these statistics started being recorded in 1992[7]. The UK is not only one of the most advanced developed countries today, it is at the same time a developing country with a **<27>** lot of structurally deprived areas. Is it a surprise that riots erupted especially in East London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester? The UK Department of Communities and Local Government reported in its analysis *The English Indices of Deprivation 2010*[8]: "Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Manchester, Knowsley, the City of Kingston-upon Hull, Hackney and Tower Hamlets are the local authorities with the highest proportion of LSOAs amongst the most deprived in England. [...] The north east quarter of London, particularly Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets continue to exhibit very high levels of deprivation" (pp. 1, 3). Decades of UK capitalist development shaped by deindustrialization and neoliberalism have had effects on the creation, intensification and extension of precariousness and deprivation. Capitalism, crisis and class are the main contexts of unrests, uproar and social media today.

Social media are embedded into contradictions and the power structures of contemporary society. This also means that in society, in which these media are prevalent, they are not completely unimportant in situations of social struggles. Social media have contradictory characteristics in contradictory societies: they do not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather pose contradictory potentials that stand in contradictions with influences by the state, ideology, capitalism and other media. Social media are not the causes of societal phenomena. They are rather a mirror of the power structures and structures of exploitation and oppression that we find in contemporary society. They are tools of communication embedded in power structures. They can both play a role for exerting control, exploitation and domination as well as for challenging asymmetric power structures of domination and exploitation. And in actual reality they do both at the same time.

One can however not assume that the economic, political and cultural power strutures that frame media use are equally accessible and available for both sides. Economic, political and cultural elites tend to enjoy advantages in access to media and mediated visibility. The political task is to find ways how less powerful groups can be empowered so that their voices can be heard in the media and can have transformative influences on society. How social and

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[7] http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/jan/19/youth-unemployment-heads-towards-1-million
[8] http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1871538.pdf

other media can empower citizens, workers, consumers and prosumers is not a given. It is not an automatism or a necessity. It is a difficult and complex political challenge that has thus far not been adequately approached.

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