

I Don't Wanna Be Part Of Your Facebook Revolution

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Facebook has turned all of us into addicted, narcissistic cheerleaders. It has become increasingly difficult to quit Facebook, a “public space” that could suddenly make or break our revolutions. It has been said that the true revolution will not be televised, but it won't be *facebooked* either.

Last summer, I started to deeply and seriously doubt myself – 80% of the content my Facebook friends were posting was related to their fight against the suddenly tyrannical Turkish regime. Does it have to do with my age? Had I become more conservative? If I don't re-post, will that mean I am betraying the struggle we are all claiming to be engaged in against capitalism? If I don't re-post, will I be seen as betraying my “friends”? Saddened by the fact that I seem to fail to identify with my generation, with people who have similar educations as myself, with the people who seem to want the same future as me, my stomach was telling me there was something suspiciously neoliberal about these proclaimed fights against neoliberalism.

As a result of being labelled as too cynical or nihilist by my close friends, I stopped commenting on most of the political events of the past few years. I started to believe that my attitude was related to my own past, to this highly valued and fetishised opportunity of having participated in a “revolution”.¹ I believed I should remain silent and let my friends have their own revolution. I did this without telling them that it is not as heroic as it seems; that some people will more than likely end up dying; that the revolt will slowly end up being used by various groups for their own political and economic gains; and that revolution does eat its own children.

No, back in those days, we didn't have Facebook. A pity, some might say, as the creativity expressed was never turned into powerful images that could be easily shared worldwide. But I'm actually thankful that at least that is something we didn't have. We were forced to go out and claim the squares and streets. And yes, it is possible to organise massive gatherings without Facebook. No, we never produced an exhibition about the revolution (there goes one idea!). All we managed was the publication of an obscure book about the ethnography of the protest, which probably nobody has ever read. Of course, it is us, the mere participants, who were and will forever remain the "naive" ones, just like there will always be the guys who know how to turn a profit from their "revolution". After a few weeks of student uprisings, the student protest leadership was invited and flown to Washington, DC, where they were given workshops and advice on how a democracy works. Other members of the student protest leadership were soon recruited by the various political parties, turning its unofficial leader into a future vice-prime minister who became a key player in the arrest of Milošević. Others were heavily subsidised by foreign democratic organisations and recruited for a movement called "Otpor!" (Resistance!), whose leaders continued to train young people in Ukraine, Georgia and Egypt on how to overthrow their own dictators. Others meanwhile ended up somewhere in a hot California desert to create games with similar democratisation goals.

There seems to be something inherently wrong with this gesture of turning one's "revolutionary" struggle into a series of iconic images before a revolution has actually happened. Back in the olden days, we spent every single day for almost six months on the streets. We maintained our struggle from November 1996 to April 1997, during one of the coldest winters I can remember. There was an aim to be achieved, to expose electoral fraud because votes had been stolen during the elections. We also wanted to address the corruption of democracy, or whatever we believed democracy should be. We didn't have time to think about posting or sharing photos. We were too busy dealing with the struggle itself and international television crews soon departed. But our struggle continued for bloody freezing six months. Sometimes without sleep, sometimes without food, and we didn't care whether it was raining or snowing. We never thought it was important to actually hold a collective yoga class to reveal our goals. There was no time for relaxation, only frustration followed by more frustration.

I'm glad all of this is not happening now, in a period that has seen a frightening increase in police power and firepower and is further characterised by the state's embrace and protection of multinational corporations. And let us not forget, Facebook is one of these multinationals. It was initially created by a bunch of college guys at one of the most prestigious American universities to rank the girls they couldn't have, and eventually mushroomed into a tool that turned teenage narcissism into unimaginable profits. Facebook has turned all of us into addicted, narcissistic cheerleaders. It has become increasingly difficult to quit Facebook, a "public space" that could suddenly make or break our revolutions. It has been said that the true revolution will not be televised, but it won't be facebooked either. If Facebook now represents the "public domain", there must be something wrong – either with the public, or with the domain itself.

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Footnotes

1. In the winter of 1996–97, university students and the Serbian opposition organised a series of peaceful protests, in response to the electoral fraud perpetrated by Slobodan Milošević's regime during the 1996 local elections. The protests lasted from 17 November 1996 to well beyond 11 February 1997, when Milošević signed the "lex specialis", which signalled that he had accepted the victory of the opposition, which led to the establishment of local governments in several cities. During the course of the rallies, students continued to protest separately from the citizen demonstrations, and their protests continued until 22 March 1997, as students made additional demands that included replacing the University of Belgrade's management and the reinstatement of university autonomy. For more see: en.wikipedia.org

Tags

Activism, Media Society, Public Domain, Public Space

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