IMMATERIAL LABOUR UNION

LIKE
BUTTONS

#5

Editors' Note

Lídia Pereira and Rosie Gram

Welcome to the 5th issue of the Immaterial Labour Union zine. After a somewhat long break, we are back with a new issue: "Like Buttons".And what great timing, when just recently Zuckerberg announced the launching of Facebook Reactions, a response to popular demands of a 'dislike' button.
A small walk-through of this issue: Fauno stresses the assymetry of the 'decentralised' web, Harry Halpin assumes a critical posture towards the premises of corporate and state-based decentralisation, Δεριζαματζορ experiments with the aesthetics of like culture, Mercedes Bunz maps Facebook's affirmative discourse to global power tendencies of stifling critique, Erik H. Zepka conceives of the apathetic button and Mathijs van Oosterhoudt takes us through the different levels of obfuscation associated with the button.
A lot more could be said about this topic, so...stay tuned for part 2!

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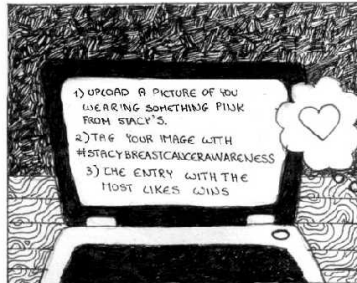

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Like Charity

Lídia Pereira and Mathijs van Oosterhoudt

Reaction to Facebook Reactions

Simone Cassiani

One button I'll press, a caress,
Just one stroke will suffice.
My fingers play faces, erotica quantified:
deep-set emotions reduced to one sign.
Sweet binary nothings...
All riddled with vice.

Emotional likeness is not hard to find
When all emotions are yellow, jaundice-ridden and blind
Drunk in desperation, a friend to comprehend, sublime...
To comprehend I said, when I meant analyze.

Emotional artefacts of miserable flatness
Sadness sells cheap, empathy's high on the market.
The alphabet, grown weary, would never serve me so well
I'll keep pushing your buttons, you will lift my dry spell.

We wanted freedom in the cloud and we only got a more complex web

Fauno

Five years have passed since Eben Moglen, even before Assange, Manning and Snowden, talked about freedom in the cloud[1] and how surveillance was embedded into the Internet, and more specifically into a client-server protocol called HTTP that's the base for the Web.

The Web isn't decentralized, but a network architecture where some have information, in the form of web pages, and others have access to it by downloading them. This relationship is always asymmetrical. The person on the consuming side is able to share information, but she doesn't run the application. Client and server aren't equal when only the latter can determine what can and cannot be done in that communication.

In that talk, Moglen was very clear about the goals we had to fulfil in order to achieve freedom in the Net. One of them was to have the servers in our homes. We've had enough with delegating those conversations to impersonal, corporative, third parties.

He was also very clear in something else, which was quickly forgotten because we're not only moglenian anarchists but also silicon libertarians.

What he said was that the software we need in our homes already existed. The software that runs email and web servers, the software that builds free, distributed and resilient networks already exists. Things that have been working for 40 years and won't go down even when you try to kick the shit out of them.

But 5 years have passed and every day there's a new project trying to reinvent this revolutionary indestructibility over that protocol that's the opposite of everything: HTTP.

Post-scriptum
While others promised email at home, but started by reinventing webmail, at LibreVPN[2] we made a more modest effort by taking the already existing email software called postfix, and configuring it

to send email between machines in the same network and also to Internet, delegating the latter capability to a dumb third party.

This means that while using a machine called 'urras', logged in as 'shevek', you can write to 'takver' on the machine called 'anarres' and that email will travel from 'urras' to 'anarres' without intermediaries. In e-email jargon, this is expressed as 'shevek@urras' sending a message to 'takver@anarres'.

The protocol that runs e-mail, SMTP, was designed 30 years ago for writing messages from machine to machine and we just needed 3 changes on a configuration file, plus a transport wire without intermediaries watching and blocking.

But who can take away the crowdfunding and the experience of reinventing the wheel, uh?

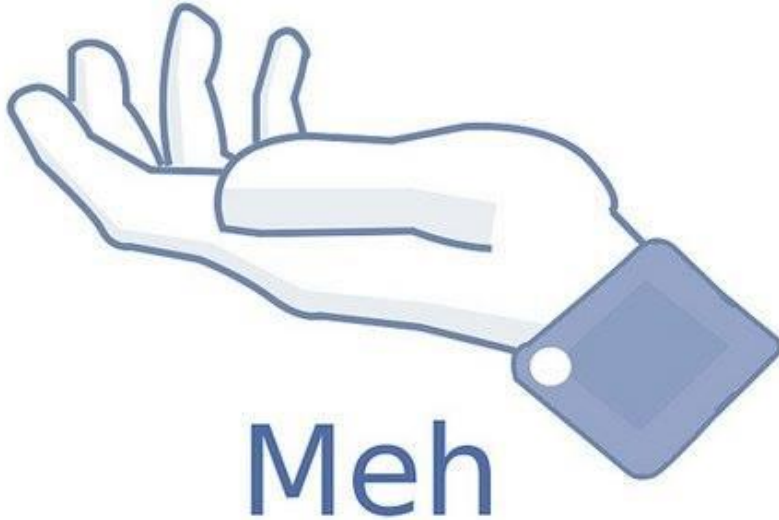*Author's contact details:* fauno@endefensadelsl.org

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1: https://www.softwarefreedom.org/events/2010/isoc-ny/FreedomInTheCloud-transcript.html
2 : http://librevpn.org.ar

Meh

Erik H. Zepka

Word has it that Zuckerberg is working on a new button that will allow users to express absolutely no emotion in relation to a status - users will finally have an opportunity to let others know that their status hasn't affected them in the slightest, and there was really no point in posting it at all - the amount of emotional repression social technology has been privy to preceding this update is absolutely unconscionable.

Networked Global Intercommunalism for the Self-Organized Survival of the People

Harry Halpin

The digital social network has become the technical infrastructure for a global networked state, even if the political and legal trappings for such a global state do not yet exist. The tight connection between state and corporate control of social networks is self-evident, as the NSA can only come into being insofar as they can easily compel Facebook to hand over their data on users. Without Facebook there would be no NSA, just as without IBM there would have not been a Holocaust.
Is there any positive alternative to this emerging new totalitarianism, where our 'authentic' name on Facebook will be our real identity card? Technically the alternatives have not been thought through deeply. A self-hosted identity on our 'own' websites would only lead to a self-enforced totalitarianism, a more decentralized global state.

Could there be a bright side to global state, such as universal basic income? Yet the hard questions are not even being asked by the proponents of universal basic income: Who will precisely guarantee the basic income? Who will hand it out? A universal state is implicit in the demand for a universal basic income. If not-so-universal basic income were handed out on a national level, then immediately one would enter into a situation where rich nation-states, still profiting off of their colonial histories, would simply use the basic income to increase their wealth while those in ex-colonial countries would likely continue to live in a neo-feudal slavery (digital or not) even if rich Europeans and North Americans entered the cybernetic socialist utopia.

Worse, if Facebook was nationalized, handing our digital social network over to the national Post Office to run (as suggested by Morozov) or supported by public funds (as put forward by Fuchs), would not guarantee our identities would be democratically controlled in any real sense of the world. Indeed, suggestions to nationalize Facebook are idiotic, failing to recognize that the NSA itself is a publicly funded national institution of US "democracy." Corporate digital authoritarian and state-based authoritarianism are equally one and the same, hard to tell apart

and increasingly internalized by all of us via our self-regulation of behavior on networks like Facebook and Twitter.

So far, attempts to decentralize Facebook so far have ultimately served both the interests of global capital and the state - and even Facebook itself. After all, the "Like" button is decentralized with a single point of surveillance. So while it appears that the treaty of Westphalia may be dissolving, appearances can be deceiving, for it may also be that the nation-states are simply evolving. This year, the proponent of the decentralized social graph and inventor of the Facebook "Like" Button, David Recordon, began working at the White House. The global networked state may be closer than we think.

A new revolutionary strategy for an immaterial labour union is needed that goes beyond vague hand-waving about the "commons" - and far beyond asking for charity from states or corporations in the form of universal basic income. The kernel could be found in the survival program of the Black Panther Party: Their vision of a networked global intercommunalism for the self-organized survival of the people. Ultimately, revolutions are about not about states or income at all. A revolution is based on the bottom-up self-organization of people, starting with the oppressed. it is true that we are oppressed in subtle forms as our own social relationships is reified within digital social networks. Yet within these selfsame digital social networks, we have for the first time in human history the possibility of global bottom-up self-organization. If only we would remember that long-forgotten refrain: All Power to the People!

OMG Works

Δεριζαματζορ Προμπλεμ ιναυστραλια
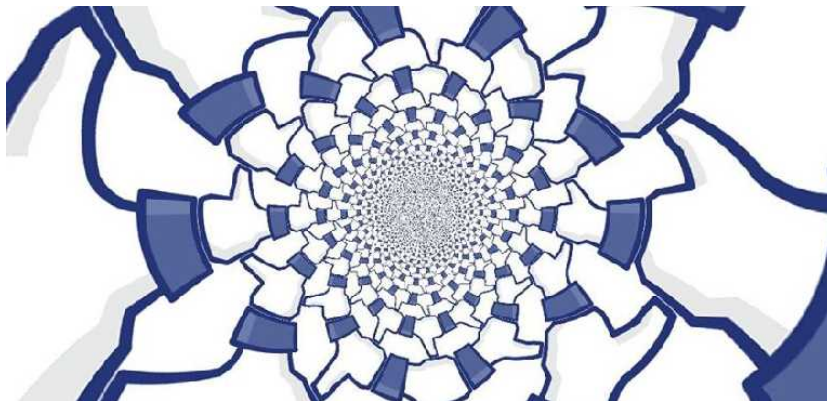
"OMG it really works ♥

Step 1: Click on the Picture.

Step 2: Hit Like.

Step 3: Comment "MOVE" Then see the Magic!!"

"OMG it really works ♥

Step 1: Click on the Picture.

Step 2: Hit Like.

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Button, Button

Mathijs van Oosterhoudt

The widespread adoption of the button across public spaces,
appliances, websites, etc. bears with it significant issues, and I
will now focus on two of these - obfuscation and binary reduction.
These issues can be addressed, but more often than not they are
exploited.

Obfuscation

The button is superficial, it makes invisible what happens once
the button is pressed, hiding how the mechanism works. After all,
the motion one makes to press a button is more often than not
disconnected from its outcome; for example, the action of pushing
forward has nothing to do with turning on the light. An important
consequence of this level of obfuscation is the hamper of forward
thinking - in a lot of cases, pressing a button is just the first
step in a long process, which might or might not involve further
human interaction. Hiding what happens next hinders understanding,
learning, education and subsequent disruption.
As practical examples of this we might point the like, retweet,
+1, etc. buttons - what happens with the metadata which relates to
the simple button click?

In popular culture this obfuscation is well explored in an episode
of "Twilight Zone" - "Button, button.". A poor family is offered
the chance to solve their financial situation. "All" they have to
do is press a button to get 200,000$. However, in return, someone
they personally don't know dies.

Pressing a button is easy, but what happens might in fact be very
complex. Take several websites' terms of service: Everything will
be decided in one easy click. With one click of a button we can
agree or sign up for all kinds of things, we can even change our
lives! Take what it is now known as the push button war: the push
of a button can have all manner of political effects. Button-
controlled military technology further detaches the soldier from
her/his actions.

Binary reduction

Binary reduction is instrumental to a technology supposed to

convey a single action: Either the action takes place, or it doesn't. Whether in the form of an on / off switch, a button that opens the door or one that signs you up for a newsletter, it is indifferent. You either press a button or you don't. However, very seldom is the outcome of the action a binary event. Whether you agree 80% or 40% with the terms of service, you either agree (press the button) or you don't. Complex decisions are reduced to 1s and 0s.

As You Like It: Critique in the Era of an Affirmative Discourse

Mercedes Bunz

I like. You like. He likes. She likes. We like, and we like a lot. Three billion two hundred million of mostly likes but also comments have been generated by users daily in the first quarter of 2012 according to Facebook.The counterpart of an 'I dislike' or Hate button is neither existing nor is it planned. An efficient trick: Facebook barely needs to discipline its users, instead it rather designs their actions, and these are positive. It is not that there can't be disagreement on Facebook. It is only that its utterance is made more elaborate as it needs to be declared in the comments. Thus, it cultivates the approach of agreement instead of critique with a design that visually prefers affirmation. At first sight, this approach of Facebook can be explained by the fact that friends generally have positive things to say to each other. They have some things in common, respect each other, and share some interests. Facebook, however, isn't simply a network of friends, but of several millions of friends. This is precisely why the affirmation cultivated on Facebook has a social dimension – it is much more than just a private matter among friends. When its basic design avoids the dialectic order of the modern discourse, for or against, to replace it with the affirmative proposition 'I like', it unfolds a discursive style that is about to become more and more dominant in our societies: the rise of an affirmative discourse. Can critique be saved?

Facebook's design clearly imposes the discourse of affirmation upon us, but when we look around (which we will do in a moment) we can also sense it in society, so its appearance in Facebook might well be nothing but a social trend a smart developer like Mark Zuckerberg decided to take up. With Facebook making affirmation apparent, let us now turn our attention to the political reality we live in, in order to see if we can sense it being used as a tool in today's social discourse of power.

In politics, the degeneration of the dialectical order has been evident for some time in both domestic and foreign affairs. Concerning internal politics, the old categories of 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' parties,established for the seating arrangement of

the French National Assembly of 1789, have been questioned in most industrial states.

Concerning foreign affairs, the division of an east and a west bloc collapsed with the fall of the Berlin wall. So where to now that the dialectical order has fallen apart? It must be said, that the idea of a 'third way' didn't take us very far.Today, it slowly becomes apparent that a certain type of affirmation has widely replaced opposition, and the British government's attitude towards the European Union is a very good example of this.

While Thatcher's political power is clearly visible in her negation of the EU, Cameron's power enacts the same but operates subversively under the cover of affirmation: it's not his fault that he vetoed a fiscal pact 25 other EU states had agreed to join, he wanted an agreement.

Playing hide and seek in a globalized world is how power in the era of affirmation operates: dodge responsibility, just indicate good will – we are not the ones responsible, indeed we also don't like this problem and agree with you. This discursive style – duck and cover with affirmation – has already found its talking head in the humble Rupert Murdoch, a businessman who claims not to be responsible for his business, the company News International. Today executives just sign, but don't leave signatures in their company's culture. Illegal phone hacking, as it came to light in the scandal of July 2011, might have been a practice in not just one, but several of his publishing houses. Yet still, he explicitly stated he would not accept his ultimate responsibility and instead handed failures down further and further until they were out of his reach and rested with the regular guy on high street: 'I hold responsible the people who I trusted to run it and the people they trusted.

Negative critique has been conceptually important for pushing our societies forward. Hegel, for example, gave it a central role when he described that an existing condition is enhanced by its negation, and both the condition and its negation, are synthesized and 'sublated' to a new level. 'That which enables the Notion to advance itself' he says, 'is the already mentioned negative which it possesses within itself; it is this which constitutes the genuine dialectical moment'. It is the negative that 'enables to advance' as it introduces progress to a society, for even in its most general sense of faultfinding, negative critique aimed to make the world better (despite cynics who might object, saying it made the faultfinders feel better). Negative critique was about

improving, and if critique no longer reaches the one it means to oppose, one has to ask 'how can our societies make progress?'

Clearly dialectics as much as negative critique hasn't just been a philosophical concept. Far beyond the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, they are central to human emancipation, and their signature left a deep mark on modernity in general and democracy in particular. All democratic societies rest on the assumption that we have a government and an opposition that by negating the government's policy doesn't simply control it, but also challenges it for the better, as in progress. Opposition in the form of positioning a left and right structured our public social life, parliaments, as well as newspapers and media organizations. Thus, when the concept of critique is at stake, our modern democratic societies have reason to worry.

(Text originally published in 'Unlike Us Reader')