



## Social movements and their technologies: Wiring social change

Akser, M. (2015). Social movements and their technologies: Wiring social change. *New Media and Society*, 17(7), 1194-1196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815579890a>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

**Published in:**  
New Media and Society

**Publication Status:**  
Published (in print/issue): 01/08/2015

**DOI:**  
[10.1177/1461444815579890a](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815579890a)

**Document Version**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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sees color as the driving force behind our entire digital culture (e.g. on p. 289) may seem a little too ambitious, but there is a great wealth of material in this book that scholars of the digital, well beyond art historians, will find valuable.

Several books of late have chosen this kind of very specific entry point for discussing new media. Timothy Scott Barker's (2012) *Time and the Digital: Connecting Technology, Aesthetics, and a Process Philosophy of Time* similarly looks at works of digital art from a new and quite narrow perspective. Kelly A. Gates' *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (2011) is not interested in art per se, but looks at the ways in which the technology of biometrics has developed in concert with the technologies of photography and of surveillance, in many ways reminding me of Kane's discussion of color technology and surveillance. Each of these three approaches, color, time, and facial recognition, allows us to reconsider our own digital culture and to understand its history in convincing and very clearly focused ways.

## References

- Barker TS (2012) *Time and the Digital: Connecting Technology, Aesthetics, and a Process Philosophy of Time*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press.
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Stefania Milan, *Social movements and their technologies: Wiring social change*. Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013; xiii + 233 pp.: ISBN-10: 0230309180, \$90.00 (hbk)

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Stefania Milan's book is about the interaction between social movements and how they use media technologies. Her main premise is that communication technologies are instrumental in giving social movements a voice, and that beyond this, they are part of the impact of the social movements and they affect the way these movements operate. She calls the real life use of media in social movement activism "Emancipatory Communication Practices," which she treats as a function of technological development that in return changes the political culture. The research brings together two different strands of research that are artificially separated by their respective disciplines: social movement research and media studies. Milan carefully situates her argument that in order to understand the interaction between social movements and media technology, one has to look deep into the practices of those activists who work in traditional media (community radio) and new media (radical techies, hackers, etc.). She places the emphasis on organized collective action, hence dealing with sociological theories of organization. Milan also favors an understanding of activists' motivations and identity building processes. She searches for what she calls "action repertoires of collective actors" (p. 170), alternative communication methods of activists who aim to create autonomous zones and prefigurative politics.

Milan's methodology is innovative. She uses anonymous detailed interviews with two groups of individuals in different countries. Through a selection of research questions

designed to involve social actors in a process of self-reflection and assessment, she claims to reverse the trend of closed abstract theoretical research into social phenomena. Rather, she interrogates the role and the power of the researcher. For Milan, “engaged research” must be designed to make a difference for people belonging to the disempowered communities that are beyond academic community.

The book is divided into six main sections, an epilogue, and an appendix. The first section is an introductory chapter concerning the broader concept of emancipatory communication activism. The second chapter chronicles the history and roots of contemporary activism. Milan identifies waves of organizational activism at the global institution level that failed three times in 1985, 1995, and 2005 with New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other international initiatives. She also lists two kinds of contemporary activism: collective and individual. Under collective activism can be found community broadcasting activism, such as community radio. Under the rubric of individual activism, she locates radical techies, those individuals who engage in activism such as hacktivism, liberation technology, and cloud protesting. In the next four chapters, Milan analyzes, compares, and contrasts both groups in terms of movement formation, and identity building. She considers the emergence of collective action as a response to perceived injustice. From this framework, activists see media organization as reproducing injustice and want to fight back through their own independent media. In chapter 4, Milan looks at organizational forms and how organizational forms guide collective action in emancipatory media activism. In this section, she questions the way both types of activists view internal democracy through the parameters of power, consensus, and decision-making. Milan also shows us how both groups empower women and queers. Chapter 5 addresses repertoires of action. Milan focuses on the choice of action and how that choice is made by the activists relating to activists’ political targets. She categorizes the activists as insiders who work within the system as policy makers, outsiders who prefer civil disobedience and run pirate radios or engage in Internet blackouts, and beyond-ers, activists who do not engage with institutions and in fact reject institutions and are in search of new alternative new systems. Chapter 6 looks at how these separate movements can work as transnational networks through international associations. Milan’s epilogue summarizes the finding, and appendix is a detailed discussion of and justification for the method of inquiry.

Milan’s approach is structural and informed by political sociology and organization theory. She is careful to avoid the potential pitfalls of structural framework analysis by constantly stating that her research is *engaged* and working from outside in, she has a detailed almost ethnographic in-depth case studies of two groups that are both operating locally and transnationally at the same time. Her findings related to both old and new media activists. Her exploration into group collective action of community radio broadcasters and individual action of techies is about finding similarities as well as differences in the motivations and tactics of emancipatory communication activism. She finds that technology has an impact on the way activists experience their collective identity in collapsing individual identities to become an enlarged group as in the case of radio activists and individual interaction as the method of activism with radical techies. Her classification of tactics of activists that identifies three categories of insiders, outsiders, and

beyond-ers is interesting and is worth pursuing with further study. Her construction of arguments is fed by empirical research, which she then feeds into theory building relating to both social movement studies and media studies.

Overall, Milan's work puts in line with some of the earlier and pioneering work on media and social movements, such as John Downing's *Radical Media* (2000) as well as his most recent *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media* (2010). Milan favors an approach adopted by Carroll and Hackett (2014) who invented the term "democratic media activism" in Canada, a term used both to treat communication as a tool and as end of struggle. Milan looks at the grassroots of media activism at both group and individual level through the lens of sociological theory with its features of mobilizing frames, identity building, and action repertoires. By addressing emancipatory communication practices through the point of view of social movement research, Milan's book fills the gaps in previous studies of social movement media.

### References

- Carroll WK and Hackett RA (2014) Democratic media activism through the lens of social movement theory. *Media, Culture, and Society* 28(1): 83–104.
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