Greens' Art: Art and Digital Media in the Green Movement of Iran (2009-2011)

by

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Summary

When Mahmood Ahmadinejad was proclaimed the winner of the 2009 Iranian presidential election, both popular and critical opinion held that the election was a fraud and that the regime had hijacked it. The election result provoked dissatisfied voters, general public and activist groups that pre-dated the election, to initiate protests throughout the country. From these protests, the Green Movement of Iran was born.

This project-led PhD documents and investigates the role of art and digital media in the Green Movement. Through an analysis of the available literature, artworks, interviews and online resources, this research investigates how art and digital media were used by activists, artists and everyday citizens in their confrontation with the government. The creative outcome of this research is the Greens' Art website (www.greens-art.net) which is the most comprehensive online archive and curated exhibition of artworks created and circulated during the pre- and post-election periods. The exegesis part of this research explores the role of digital media, art, and user-generated content, on the dynamics of the Green Movement. In doing so, this research advances our understanding of the significance of aesthetics in this Movement.

Digital media played a significant role in the formation, progression and maintenance of the Green Movement. The full-scale engagement of protesters and government in cyberspace can be taken as a milestone in the history of digital and political engagement, pre-dating other recent uprisings, such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement. For their part, the government of Iran applied the most complicated filtering system on the internet and used all available technical and political strategies to isolate the protesters in cyberspace. The people, in response, did their best to bypass the limitations and keep their connections alive. Moving beyond the idealistic notions of a 'Twitter Revolution', the exegesis demonstrates how digital media plays a major role in spreading information, by helping protesters to organise some significant rallies and other collective actions, inside and outside Iran.

The absence of a copyright system in Iran, coupled with public access to photo/video/music editing software, led to the emergence of vast numbers of amateur and professional creative efforts. Edited photos with political meanings, audio and video clips that represented the protesters' responses, while sometimes technically amateurish, were some of the first aesthetic products to come out of the post-election period. These were (and continue to be) distributed over social media networks, circulated globally and addressed both internal and external audiences. The exegesis demonstrated that these artistic and expressionistic uses of digital media assisted people who lacked the political freedom of expression be heard.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Introduction

On 12 June 2009, the Islamic Republic of Iran held its tenth presidential election in which four candidates competed for the position. Among them, Mahmood Ahmadinejad (the incumbent) and Mohsen Rezaei (the secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran) were the conservative candidates and the closest to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei. Mirhossein Mousavi (the first Prime Minister of Iran, from 1981 to 1989) and Mehdi Karroubi (the former chairman of the Parliament of Iran, from 1989 to 1992) took reformist positions. The day after the election, although Ahmadinejad was elected, both popular and critical opinion held that the election was a fraud and the regime had hijacked it. Declaring Ahmadinejad as the winner by claiming 63% of the popular vote, confirmed his presidency for another four years and provoked dissatisfied voters who then initiated protests across the country (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.172). Kevin Cross's interpretation of the uprising could be true in that "[it] was a passion for math, not regime change that impelled Iranians onto the streets in the summer of 2009" (Cross 2010, p.169). Out of these protests, the Green Movement of Iran was born. This Movement, however, was not formed only by voters who supported the reformist candidates at this specific election. A range of existing social, civic and political movements (e.g. the Student Movement of Iran, The Women's Movement, Sexual Revolution) also came together with individuals who sought a fundamental change in the structure of the ruling class in Iran – people who found a potential for change in the situation and the structure of the government. As the professor of international relations, Mahmood Monshipouri believes, this movement "posed more existential threats to the Islamic Republic than the combined pressures of U.S. and UN sanctions in the past 30 years" (Monshipouri & Assareh 2009, p.43). From the very beginning of the protests, the profound effects of the Green Movement on Iran's political climate were so obvious

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that it bought questions to the observers' minds like, " [Is] it the beginning of an end for Iran's regime?"

The Green Movement was not the first non-violent protest against the government in Iran's history. Iranians had experienced at least two other major non-violent political actions: the Tobacco Revolt, from 1890 to 1892, and the Constitutional Revolution, from 1905 to 1911 (Shabani 2013, p.347). The leaders of the Green Movement emphasised its non-violent nature repeatedly. For example, as Mirhossein Mousavi says: "Non-violent resistance is an uncompromising value of this movement." Omid Shabani argues that the acceptance of these words and putting them into practise by people is rooted in their previous political experiences and what they learned from them. He refers to four major trends that affected the Iranian mindset: The 1979 revolution; the Iran-Iraq war; the relative opening of civil society during Khatami's presidency; and the modernisation of faith. These trends affected the growing population of students, activist women and those who were contributing to the reformist parties after Khatami's presidency. These groups formed the core of the Green Movement. In addition, Shabani recognises the increasing rate of urbanization and literacy as catalysts for this process (Shabani 2013, pp.354–355).

The Green Movement and its context are important for several reasons. First, it involved the most pervasive and prolonged protest against the government of Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Secondly, it was powerful enough to strongly challenge the authoritarian state of Iran and undermine its legitimacy forever. Thirdly, it has provided a rich terrain for new and critical debates about social, political, cultural and moral concerns around the world. And, fourthly, this movement significantly advanced discussions around the power of the media in political engagements.

Definitions

Six years after the emergence of the Green Movement, and all the political turmoil we experienced in Iran, it is impossible to arrive at a single definition of this

Movement. Some of the protesters saw it as a revolution to free Iran from the dictatorship of the Mullahs at the time. Others found it a way to make the government hold another election. Today, some people talk about the Movement's death and some believe it is still alive and looking for a chance to demonstrate its power again. There are also a group of commentators who believe that the Green Movement has just continued the process of gradual change in the country; a change that will appear, sooner or later, with a different name and priorities.

To understand the placement and role of art and new media in the Green Movement, it is important to understand its nature and structure as a social movement. There have been different categories of social movements in history. Author of *Alternative and Activist New Media* (2011), Leah Lievrouw, identified three new approaches in social movement theories: "collective behaviour theory", "resource mobilisation theory" and "new social movement theory." The theorists of collective behaviour theory tended to "focus on the emotional or irrational quality of mass movements, their spontaneity or random appearance, the marginality or alienation of participants, the [contagion] of ideas and actions among susceptible social groups, and the manipulability of the crowd or [mass] especially by media and propaganda" (Lievrouw 2011, p.44). In contrast, by taking social movements as "rational games," the theorists of resource mobilisation theory "focused on *how* movements organize themselves, how participants make choices and use resources from the network of larger social and institutional structures beyond the movement itself to achieve their goals, and how movements persist over time" (Lievrouw 2011, p.45). These theorists believe that "[organizational] strategies" and "opportunity structures" play more significant roles in social movements than emotions and sentiments. Lievrouw states that even the resource mobilisation theory has some gaps when it comes to explaining the social movements of post-industrial societies in the late 1960s and onwards, which are built on "networked information technologies, media culture, and an emerging class of highly educated, creative [knowledge workers]." Therefore, a new approach called the 'new social movement theory' was born to address new questions about contemporary movements.

It should be mentioned here that there is no agreement on the dimensions and characteristics of a new social movement except for the fact that while NMSs are

engaged in political and social conflicts in many new ways, traditional ones "tend to be engaged in class conflict" (Anon 2016). Different theorists from various schools of thought (Castells, Touraine, Habermaas, and Melucci) have studied the characteristics of such movements against the conventional ones and discussed the newness of each of them (Buechler 1995, pp.443–447). Discussing the background and ideas included in each of these theories is not the focus of this project. Among all the available contributions Leah Lievrouw's interpretation of New Social Movement efficiently facilitates the development of my main discussion around the role of art and digital media in the Green Movement as a NMS. This is why no other figures' ideas are used in this exegesis.

Based on Lievrouw's definition, some key characteristics of their *actors* and *actions* make new social movements, 'new'. Their participants and constituencies consist of "knowledge/information workers, professionals, well-educated, creative workers." They build a collective identity by keeping their independence from "institutional structures" and focusing on constructing and sharing of common subjectivity. They are constantly engaged with "construction and control of information, symbolic resources, representations of group interests, expertise norms [and] values" – "meaning and symbolic production." Social movements need symbols and meaning production "to create a sense of 'we'" (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.33). Regarding the action, new social movements work as "anti-hierarchical social networks of interpersonal relations; micromobilization; ... decentralized, autonomous organizational form" (Lievrouw 2011, p.48). Actions in new social movements are integrated into the everyday lives of participants. ICTs and media are used extensively and in sophisticated ways in such movements. Lievrouw notes that these movements have "unconventional action repertoires" and their actions extend over time and space; as they continuously realign and reorganise over time.

One thing is clear, however, this Green Movement has nothing to do with trees or global warming. The colour, green, was chosen by the campaign of the reformist candidate, Mirhossein Mousavi, based on religious references. Green is a traditional and sacred symbol of Islam and has a special place in Shia. The descendants of Imam Ali – the main holy leader of Shias after Muhammad the prophet – have, traditionally, had a green element in their clothing (e.g. green hats, green

wristbands). Supporters of Mousavi's campaign began to call themselves the "Green Wave of Freedom." Choosing a colour for a presidential campaign was an unfamiliar strategy in Iran's political history. This act was especially sensitive as a reformist candidate was already using green, a religious colour. The reaction of Mousavi's rivals though, including the conservatives, was to use a similar tactic by choosing different colours to compete with him. Nonetheless, the domination of the Greens was obvious. After a while the colour, green, appeared on all kinds of things that could be used as a means of advertising; from supporters' costumes to their profile pictures in social media. With the emergence of the Green Movement after the election, the significance of this colour gradually shifted away from its original meaning and became the symbol of hope and resistance in Iran. As "it was devoid of religious meaning, … secular people felt comfortable in using it to show their beliefs" (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.28). Since then, it has been utilised by the supporters of many different groups opposed to Iran's government, effectively coming to symbolise opposition, in general.

This research explores the significance of the artistic heritage generated during the crisis period, the way the protesters produced, distributed and consumed these contents through digital media, and the way they established and contributed to their unique participatory system of information. By 'they' I am referring to the range of people who were engaged with the Movement: activists, artists, journalists, protesters and everyday citizens; although these labels cannot give us a clear definition of the role they took within the protests. The crisis situation made people move between different roles when necessary. They sometimes had to take a multiplicity of roles to do what the Movement needed. For example, the word *artivist* is used in this exegesis to refer to those actors in the field who were artists and activists at the same time. The word *artist* refers to professionals and amateurs alike. In fact, most of the works collected in the Greens' Art website or discussed in this research were made by amateurs, everyday citizens, who used art as a means of expression, without necessarily having aspirations for a unified aesthetic.

What makes the collected works of the Greens' Art archive, the subjects of this study, stand remote from Kant's notion of "pure beauty" and the "morality" addressed by it, or any other authorised way of understanding of 'beautiful' that

seeks for a formal feature in the objects. In other words, these works are catalogued due to their ability to provoke aesthetic emotions in their audience without necessarily being 'well-made' or 'skilful'. In this exegesis, the aesthetic merit of the works has an essential dependency on social and political realities and "the seemingly inevitable partiality of different points of view" (Slater n.d., p.5). Most of the artworks used as archived materials or case studies can be taken as a response to what was going on – as a means of self-expression. More than anything, the emotional experience of the audience during the pre- and post-election period is what that gives the archived works aesthetic merit.

'New media' is another key phrase that I frequently use in this exegesis. Lievrouw defines new media "as the combination of material artefacts, people's practices and the social and organizational arrangements involved in the process of human communication" (Lievrouw 2011, p.15). However, she sees four factors in new media that distinguishes them from older media. First, "new media have developed as hybrid or recombinant technologies – they resist stabilization." Secondly, they have a networked architecture. New media "developed as continuously reorganizing, unfolding, point-to-point webs of technologies, organizations, and users." Thirdly, new media encourages "a sense of ubiquity". They are everywhere, all the time. The fourth factor is that new media are fundamentally interactive. "They give users an unprecedented degree of selectivity" (Lievrouw 2011, p.13).

Building on Lievrouw's definition of new media, I use *digital media* to describe the computer-enabled tools people use to facilitate the process of communication (e.g. mobile phones, digital cameras), on the one hand, and the objects made by these tools, on the other. Some of this latter group might be versions adapted from their non-digital forms (e.g. emails) or, essentially, enabled by digital technologies (e.g. proxies). Based on this definition, digital media can be consumed (read, modified, distributed, etc.) in computer-based environments. Some of the examples of such digital media are software, digital video, blogs, social media tools and audio files.

In this exegesis, I occasionally use the term the *Islamic Republic*, instead of Iran. While the nation-state is known as Iran, *Islamic Republic* is the term used domestically since the revolution of 1979. This use is a result of the rejection of the

Islamic Revolution by Iranians. The *government of Iran* is also a contested term. Structurally, the Supreme Leader of Iran is at the top of the power hierarchy and then there is a President who is elected every four years. The government of Mahmood Ahmdinejad was the most closely aligned government to Ayatollah Khamenei since he became the Supreme Leader, in 1989. For most of Ahmadinejad's presidency they shared similar points of view about Iran's foreign policy as well as internal social and political issues. This is commonly accepted as the reason Khamenei supported him in the 2009 presidential election. Therefore, I use the term the *government of Iran* to refer to both of these political bodies over this specific period of time (2009-2011).

The scope and the significance of this research

"Political movement is always a matter of being emotionally moved, but each movement has its own aesthetic composition" (Flood & Grindon 2014, p.12). Through this research I want to get closer to understanding the significance of the aesthetics of the Green Movement. By *aesthetics* I mean the sensory-emotional values and the political power of artworks. Moreover, I explore the ways digital media assisted art to play its role within the conflict. This thesis is a project in two parts: a web-based archive and exhibition called Greens' Art (available at: www.greens-art.net/?lang=en) and an exegesis. Taken together, these two parts – a social and historical repository of digital and digitised materials, and a cultural/media studies theoretical framework – open a new window to the interwoven structure of media and art in the Green Movement.

This project mainly focuses on preserving the relevant materials and discussing the ways in which they contributed to the formation and progression of the Movement. Therefore, I do not enter the domains of the artistic quality or the semiology of the works. Nor do I touch on the story or details of every work catalogued in this online exhibition; however, I discuss the background of a limited number of works in the exegesis. While identity comes up in one of my case studies, in Chapter 2, it is not the focus of this research to question online and offline identities or activities.

Having said that, I am aware their presence cannot be eliminated when the topic is as visceral as political freedom.

The Green Movement provides us with a rich case study of art's contribution to ongoing political conflicts. One of the reasons for recognising this grassroots movement as a significant context for the engagement of art with politics is the quantity and variety of the works, both in form and content. An important aim of this research is to open a window to a better understanding of the ways in which the Green Movement was both influenced and facilitated by art. This project also investigates the role of digital media in facilitating the engagement of art with the political 'goings on' in the crisis period.

As well as the theoretical debate, this project-led PhD also provides a reliable source of the works created and disseminated in support of, as well as opposition to, the Green Movement. This archive preserves and exhibits an important part of recent media history. It offers a categorised and well-defined way to represent the collected materials to visitors. This online platform also provides its visitors with ways to contribute to the project by sending their own materials to, and commenting on, the collection. Receiving hundreds of works from visitors since the website was launched affirmed that this project has the potential to become a unique source of user-generated content associated with the Movement. Especially, when thinking about the ephemerality of web content, the need for a project like this is undeniable. As we are still close in time to the protests, we still have the chance to protect a part of the disseminated materials and the oral history of the crisis period that will be not able to be accessed, or forgotten, in a few years.

Theoretical framework

There is a body of literature that looks at how politics and, specifically, protests relate to art and digital media; however, the Green Movement, especially its relation to art is a new realm for researchers. To establish a reliable theoretical framework for this research I used most of the available texts relating to the Green Movement and tied them to relevant academic debates and discussions about the

role of art in politics, on the one hand, and digital activism, on the other. Therefore, this research engages with two main theoretical domains: activism and user-generated content.

When it comes to the domain of activism in the Green Movement, this exegesis uses a range of key works (Morozov 2010; Vegh 2003; Earl & Kimport 2011). Leah Lievrouw's *Alternative and Activist New Media* (2011) helped me to reach clear definitions of the different factors engaged with in the Movement. User-generated content is engaged with two main domains: digital media and art. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (2013)*,* by Henry Jenkins, is among the works (e.g. Leung 2009; van Dijck 2009; Gillmor 2006) that I use to explain the economy and structure of media and the circulation of materials in the Green Movement. Aesthetics and artistic production forms in the Green Movement are at the centre of focus in this research. I used a range of works to explain why (e.g. Marcuse 1979; Becker 2010; Cohen-Cruz 2002) and how (Jenkins et al. 2013; Howard 2011) the Green protesters used art in protests.

Greens' Art is a preservation initiative, an archive and an online resource. To articulate the significance of this project I deployed the relevant literature in each field separately (e.g. Anderson 2009; Day 2003; Stuckey, Swalwell, Ndalianis, et al. 2013). I also used different kinds of literature in mapping my methodology in developing this project (e.g. Webb 2003a; UNESCO 2012; Mundy & Burton 2013; Kastellec 2012).

Methodology

The data collection process started from the very beginning of this research when all possible websites were targeted to acquire any artwork related to the Green Movement, with the aim of collecting and preserving the largest possible collection of works. Due to probable security risks I did not contact anyone inside Iran to collect materials from during this process. In addition to works created by protesters, I dedicated a section called 'Anti-Movement'. In this part of the Greens' Art project I collected and catalogued the works created and disseminated by pro-

government artists during the crisis period. I checked the accuracy of the collected data and materials and categorised them. I used a formal and generic basis to manage the artworks to prevent overlaps and allow more precise searches and, eventually, easier navigation for visitors. In addition to genre and form, chronology was another key organising tool applied to the collection. The 'Calendar' links artworks to specific dates and events. Coding each event allowed them to be more contextualised and approachable for the project's prospective visitors. As I was planning to conduct some interviews [2013-2014, semi-structured] as a part of this research, I applied for, and gained, the approval of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University.

I launched the Greens' Art Website in May 2013. I then presented the website to my interviewees, Ali, Reza, Hana, Elaheh, and Nader – who were personally engaged with the Green Movement at the time – and sent them the relevant information and consent forms. Their answers to my questions on the role of art and digital media in the Movement were used in the relevant parts of this exegesis. Their reflections also featured in the 'Testimonies' section of the Greens' Art website.

Over this time, I was contacted by visitors to the Greens' Art website. I catalogued and exhibited the, almost, 1000 works that I received through the contact form of the website and the project's official email. The collection of Iran Green Posters (available at: http://irangreenposters.org/en/) was among this series of materials. I made an agreement to co-operate with its curator, who requested anonymity, and I added all of her collected works to my archive. After this collaboration, 3000+ artefacts in 24 categories have been catalogued on this online repository: songs, poems, images, cartoons, videos, etc. I provided the project's visitors with the 'Artist' section that offered them a list of well-known artists who supported the Green Movement. I also created a list of the literature related to the Green Movement for those who were interested in the subject of this research.

To develop the theoretical framework of this exegesis, I investigated many kinds of resources and have used both primary and secondary sources. This framework, which is discussed separately in every chapter, is constructed from a range of published books, journal articles, internet-published materials, official statements,

press releases and blog posts that are relevant to the subject of this exegesis. The nature of this research needed me to engage more with a range of non-academic literature, such as, personal blogs, newsfeeds or Facebook posts. Among them, a group of texts with unknown authors are used. This anonymity can be a result of the security risks that threaten these authors. Being historically close to the event meant a lack enough time for researchers across the world to have accomplished thorough investigations, as well as being an outcome of the participation by ordinary people, and this led me to use such references in this exegesis. To summarise, the outcome of this research is based on the analysis of the materials, including: textual narratives, participant observation (my own involvement in the Green Movement), interviews with five informants who were engaged with the movement, qualitative content analysis and other relevant literature.

The Exegesis

The exegesis provides an intellectual context in which we might better understand the artworks and their role in the Movement. This research theorises about the Green Movement's aesthetic composition and considered the ways that the aesthetics of this movement were influenced, facilitated by and disseminated through digital media.

In Chapter 1, "Digital Media and the Green Movement", I focus on the significance of digital media and the tools used during the crisis. The level of Iranians' contribution to the digital arena during the period from 2009 to 2011 becomes considerable when we compare it to the realities of the regulated mass media and the government's ideological control of information channels. This chapter presents a brief history of digital media in Iran and clarifies the roles of digital media in the conflict.

Chapter 2, "Art and the Green Movement", begins with a brief background on the history of political art in Iran, to open a window onto a variety of theoretical positions on the role of art in highly charged political contexts. Based on what is perceived about the role of digital tools in the hands of protesters in the previous

chapter, I explain the ways artworks were created, circulated and consumed by protesters. The story of Neda Agha-Soltan offers a rich case study of the role of art in the Green Movement.

In Chapter 3, I explore the literature on user-generated content to situate a discussion of political activism in this arena. The case of Majid Tavakoli provides a rich example that demonstrates the value and position of user-generated content in political contexts, such as the Green Movement.

In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the details and specifics of the creative part of this research. Taking the Greens' Art website as the most comprehensive archive, online exhibition and preservation initiative related to the Green Movement at the time, I discuss these three dimensions of the project separately. After introducing these ideas, I explain the methods deployed in creating the website and the expectations I had/have for user experiences.

The conclusion briefly reviews the significance and scope of this research. I show how the Islamic Republic reacted and responded to protesters and how its behaviour influenced the role of art and digital media during the crisis period.

Chapter 1: The Green Movement and Media Technologies

"You are the Medium" (The Greens' slogan)

As a new social movement, the Green Movement has adopted digital technologies in a variety of different ways. While the state media was inaccessible for the Greens, the Green campaign encouraged its sympathisers to use digital media to spread messages and information as much as they could. The slogan, *You Are the Medium* was coined to emphasise everyday citizens' role within the highly censored media atmosphere of Iran at that time. Activists of the Green Movement used digital media extensively to create meaning through different forms, and to create multiple networks with other activists, to facilitate the ongoing protests. For the "knowledge workers" of the Green Movement, "new media and the internet have become essential resources for action and the principal contested landscape of meaning, identity, knowledge and value" (Lievrouw 2011, p.54).

 The way information technologies were used during the post-election crisis made this period a milestone in the history of political engagement with digital media. The engagement of this uprising's actors with digital technologies and, specifically, the internet was so high that the International Academy of Digital Art and Sciences listed the happenings as one of the "most influential moments of the decade" (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.25). The significant contribution of digital media in Iran's political affairs surprised the academic world as well. For example, we have the media scholar, Gholam Khiabany, who published his book *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity* in 2010 without mentioning anything

about the Green Movement of 2009. However, this book was probably written before the Green Movement was born, as there is no work published after 2008 in the list of references. It is clear that the author had not seen much significance in the role of the internet and digital tools in Iranian media and press. While he touches on the internet in two chapters of this book, he is rather doubtful about the abilities of the internet to bring changes to the Iranian political climate based on the government's control of cyberspace and the existing digital divide in the country. Interestingly, Khiabany also published the co-authored book, *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran* with Annabelle Sreberny in 2010. This book is generally written to reflect on blogging in Iran; however, the authors found it necessary to add a chapter about the Green Movement. This time, we see very excited words about the role the internet had in the 2009's uprisings: "[N]ew media are … central to understanding the dilemmas of contemporary Iranian history" (2010, p.181). Although, the authors do not recognise digital technologies as the engine of a social movement like the Green Movement, they do find progressive functions for them in Iran's political context.

In this chapter, I introduce the Iranian digital culture on the eve of unrest by briefly reviewing the history of digital technologies and media in Iran. In relating this history, I begin to unpack how the general level of knowledge in Iran about the internet and digital technologies facilitated the use of digital tools during the formation of the protests and then the progression of the Movement. This opens up a discussion about the different ways technology was used in the campaigns of different candidates and by protesters following the election. This gives way to an exploration of the central role that digital media played in the Green Movement. To achieve a comprehensive argument, in this chapter, I elaborate on the arguments of three different groups about digital media's role within the conflict: Western governments and media; theorists/commentators; and the five Iranian protestors who were personally engaged with the Green Movement at that time.

During the post-election crisis period, the protesters and their allies who believed that the election's result was rigged, on the one hand, and the government and its supporters, on the other, were engaged in a full-scale war in cyberspace. As Hamid Naficy described it:

> The 2009 postelection protests in Iran were a struggle over the soul of the

> Islamic Republic and its future structure and direction. They also marked
> the forceful re-emergence of culture and media as ideological apparatuses
> into the Iranian public sphere, mediaspace, cyberspace, and blogosphere,
> wielded by Iranian state and foreign governments, Iranian reformists, and
> protesters both inside Iran and in the Diaspora. (Naficy 2010, p.205)

These engagements, sometimes, led to vast legal and illegal actions against the netizens and online activists. One of the latest and saddest incidents was the death of Sattar Beheshti, in 2012 – an activist blogger who was criticising the government on his personal weblog. He was monitored by Iran's cyber police and was, finally, arrested and tortured until he died in prison (Dehghan 2012; Erdbrink 2012). Although Beheshti's death under torture cannot be taken as a typical incident of the crisis period, online activists still faced other serious consequences, such as prosecution, torture and imprisonment. The vast range of reports relevant to the harsh reactions of the government to cyber-activists proved how important the internet has been for both sides of the conflict (Franceschi-Bicchierai 2014; Dehghan 2013).

The expression the 'Twitter Revolution' drew huge attention to the events in Iran at this time; however, the debates relating to the significance of Twitter and other digital tools sometimes obscured the initial issues and the protests. The attention given to these tools was sometimes excessive, making them the most dominant, political lever of the conflict period: "Twitter seemed omnipotent—certainly more so than the Iranian police, the United Nations, the US government and the European union" (Morozov 2010, p.3). Such expressions published on the internet gave readers unrealistic ideas about the role that digital media played in the formation and development of the Green Movement (Kristof 2009; Sullivan 2009).

While digital media were used as a means of expression and a battlefield for online activists and the government, they were also occasionally seen as the subject of the circulated artworks themselves. Just a few days after the Election Day, when the media discourse took off, digital media tools appeared in posters, clips and even songs (Fig. 1.1). In his song *Facebook,* off the album *Hich Hich Hich* [Anything Anything Anything], Shahin Najafi used the context of the internet to talk about the *status quo* in Iran:

The world today is summed in my laptop

awake on Facebook at night

sleeping during day

like a psychic repeatedly I check my emails

from the eye who draws the pictures in net …

(Najafi 2012).

Figure 1.1. Two graphic designs of the period which demonstrate the significance of digital technologies

The status of the Iranian digital culture before the election was important to this research as it defined the context the protesters and the government encountered. In the next section I elaborate on the use of digital technology during the 2009 protests to demonstrate the extent of Iranian citizens' engagement with such technologies in their everyday life.

Iranians and Digital Technology

Iranians started to use computers in activities shortly after they became common in Western countries. The first IBM computers entered the country between 1955 and 1974 (Minoo 2007). Those computers had limited use in government organisations and had a slow growth during this period. From 1972 to 1979 the digitisation of everyday life enjoyed considerable growth. During this period, computers were used in private and government sectors, as well as in universities. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the history of digital technologies in Iran entered an era of

inactivity, a non-productive period in which the country experienced countless instabilities, such as the Iran-Iraq war, that lasted until 1984. Eventually, Iran has been able to make surprising progress since the mid-1980s (Minoo 2007). Given "the centralising state's attempt to manage the slow development of the private sector in Iran and the inhibitions placed on entrepreneurial ICT activity" (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.x). In the last 10 years, different digital technologies and personal computer use have become essential parts of everyday life in Iran – almost the same as in developed countries. This growth was the outcome of long term political and economic plans that had been designed after the Iran-Iraq war, along with authorities' emphasis on being the pattern for other Islamic countries in the region. In *Blogistan,* Sreberny and Khiabany well mentioned that: "From the start, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a developmentalist state and, since the end of the war with Iraq in 1988, even a "liberalising' state." In terms of the Internet penetration, "[i]n 1993 Iran became the second country in the Middle East to be connected to the Internet" (Azimi 2012) and has kept developing in the years since then. Explaining Iran's status regarding the development of communication technologies in 2011, the communication researcher, Philip Howard notes:

> There is one mobile phone for every two people in Iran, though in urban areas the vast majority of residents have a mobile phone. There are over 80 internet service providers operating throughout the country. About one quarter of the Iran's 70 million people have used the internet, around 10 million are regular users, and the large cohort of youth is particularly sophisticated with digital technologies. So the country has one of the world's most vibrant social media communities.(Howard 2011, p.4)

It has been hard to obtain a precise statistic about Iranians' engagement with the internet and cyber activities. Internet Word Stats (IWS) compiles the world's internet usage's statistics annually, but does not have any information about Iran after 2013. However, its previous statistics revealed a considerable rise in internet access and development in the country. The number of internet users soared from 4% to 53%, from 2000 to 2012 (IWS 2013). This website indicates there were 45 million Iranian internet users by the end of 2013, when the penetration rate reached 55.7% (IWS 2015). Regarding the Iranian Facebook subscribers, IWS says: "Data not available." While there were no exact statistics about this area, some figures have been announced by the pro-government media. In October 2011,

Farsnews – a governmental news agency – mentioned this quote of the president of technology and information of Basij, the paramilitary volunteer militia in Iran: "Although Facebook is filtered in Iran, this website has 17 million Iranian users" (FarsNews 2011). Moreover, at the beginning of 2013, Fava News, surprisingly, estimated 27 million Iranian Facebook users (Shafiei 2013). Other social media websites, such as Orkut and Yahoo 360, have also been used by Iranians since the very early days of their history.

Given the figures mentioned above, Iran's cyberspace is a complicated and contradictory environment as the Islamic Republic applies one of the most powerful and complicated filtering systems in the world. Facebook clearly shows this complexity because it is being blocked by the government while still having millions of users – facilitated by anti-censorship toolkits – all at the same time. Due to its strict censorship system, Iran has always been on the list of internet enemies released by Reporters without Borders (RWB 2013). As Vasileios Karagiannopoulos explains, the government's acts are backed by laws:

> On the legislative level, the Press Law of 1986, regulating freedom of speech and Iranian media, was amended in 2000 to apply to internet publications and also in 2009 to include personal websites and blogs in its scope. Such an amendment ensured strict penalties for dissent and afforded very wide enforcement discretion to the state-supervised regulatory agencies, such as the Press Supervisory Board. Moreover, after having forced all commercial ISPs to connect to the outside world via a single state-controlled gateway, the regime issued a maximum speed restriction of 128 Kbps for private users in 2006, thus greatly hindering the uploading or downloading of information. (2012, pp.154–155)

Peyvandha.ir serves as the face of Iran's filtering system. Established by legislation of Iran's judicial system this website is called the 'filtering page' inside Iran. Every user inside the country who browses a banned URL is redirected to this website. Having Peivandha.ir[1] in the list (Alexa 2014) of the 25 most visited websites in Iran demonstrates the restrictions on internet usage in Iran. At its peak, this website was ranked fourth on this list a few months after the 2009 election (Maghami 2014) and it continued to stay in Alexa's top 10 list, at least, until 2013 (Anon 2013). On this website one can find the related terms, laws and links to a limited number of

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[1] Address: http://peyvandha.ir

domestic online resources. Auke Rick Akkerman presented his study of different versions of Peyvandha.ir through time. He noted:

> The changes in the page essentially demonstrate the evolution of the ways the Iranians state represents its censorship policies. The notions of religious motifs decrease over time whereas the focus on Internet policy becomes more present by the last iteration of the page. The page thus evolves towards a more aesthetically neutral design, while the policies surrounding stringent state regulation and narratives around Internet control, and cultural wars from the west become the focal point content wise. (2014)

The overloaded list (Peyvandha n.d.) of cybercrimes and prohibited issues on this website shows the harsh limits on an Iranian user when accessing or creating online content. This, along with the huge consequences for bloggers and website owners who ignore or bypass the defined limits, forms the most restrictive parts of the Islamic Republic's presence in cyberspace. Howard's explanation on the sensitivity of online activities in Islamic states nicely depicts Iran's case:

> Most people use the internet to watch movies and sports events, to play video games, to keep in touch with family and friends, to chat and flirt, and to shop. These other domains of social activity can become small political acts and specific expressions of political culture, especially under state-run censorship. Unlike in the advanced democracies, political engagement online in many of these countries is not about voting online, reviewing legislative proposals, and discussing public policy options. It is about discussing the personal politics of sexuality and relationships. It is about getting news and information, sometimes about the West ... In large part, these other realms of social activity online are made political because of the active censorship in the more authoritarian Islamic regimes. (2011, p.14)

In this system, a range of consequences endanger people's everyday online activities, including no access to a 'free' internet without using proxies – bypassing the law – and not being able to easily have access to videos and content with large file sizes.

It is important to hone in on these figures before talking about the different aspects of Iranians' engagement with digital technologies in the Green Movement. In fact, it should be added to all the statistical reports that most of the digital technology phenomena (such as social media tools, broadband connections, etc.) did not enjoy a high penetration rate before the 2009 election. In *Blogistan*, Sreberny and Khiabany take a thorough look at the history of digital technologies in Iran. Besides

"Islamic Exceptionalism" they identified the harsh economic realities and the sanctions by the US and other countries as the obstacles that "have prevented the more rapid penetration of the internet." Khiabany states that "'Islamic exceptionalism', proposes that it is Islam that acts as the determining factor and the sole signifier in the realm of culture and communication" (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.1). Having said that, some commentators may undermine the side effects of the low technological penetration rate: "[T]he question of the access to a personal computer or computer literacy is entirely irrelevant, just as regular literacy was irrelevant earlier in the 19th and 20th century, for all it took was just one person per family, or a few per neighbourhood to cover the entire public domain," said Hamid Dabashi, an Iranian studies professor in the U.S. (Dabashi 2009, p.2). While this idea is probably correct for specific types of communities and conditions; in rural areas where most people receive information from mainstream media, or in communities with intellectually heterogeneous members who need individual and customised access to information, his claim becomes doubtful.

Along with face-to-face interactions, social networks and online communications encouraged more people to participate in the election process. Even given all the technological developments, on the eve of the election, a considerable proportion of the population were just initiating their engagement with cyberspace or practising their basic knowledge of the internet. For many reasons the trend of joining social media websites accelerated day-by-day during the campaign period, including the relatively easy and less controlled access to the internet facilitated by the government to encourage more people to engage with the election. This arose from the fact that the Islamic Republic has traditionally used the presidential and parliamentary elections as a means of gaining and emphasising its legitimacy in the international arena. The strategy of providing people with a politically freer space is, then, to encourage them to vote – to distract them by the illusion of a huge change in the government's behaviour. That relatively open period helped the inactive social networks and online communities become vibrant, virtual roundtables and a means of expression for the people. This process eventually increased citizens' "incentives for political participation" during the pre-election period (Moghanizadeh 2013, p.19).

As the government started to impose more controls on the internet a few days before the election Iranian citizens tried harder to reach free information. After announcing Ahmadinejad as the president, which ignited the conflict, government censorship was raised and extended to blocking Facebook and initiating heavy control of other social media tools. The government also "has sought to frame dissidents' use of technology by suggesting that they are subservient to foreign interests" (Aday et al. 2010, p.65). Those protesting against the result of the election used all the different software tools available to bypass this censorship. In the very early weeks after the Election Day, social networks and, especially, Facebook became the main media available for protesters: "Facebook was an effective communication tool for dissents [sic] because the government cut off text messaging services for a long time after the election and it was the only tool [protesters] had" (Moghanizadeh 2013, p.20). In having similar ideas about Facebook, Sreberny and Khiabany stated: "[M]any people were permanently logged in and its 'chat' facility helped many to keep in touch with loved ones and colleagues inside Iran" (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.173). Consecutive waves of social and political changes over a very short period of time, and the government's suppressive force against the freedom of speech during this period accelerated the process and pushed Iranian citizens to engage with digital tools and participate in online activities.

'Participation' is still an ambiguous term in digital discourse. A 2007 survey shows that only 13 percent of User-Generated Content sites' participants are 'active users' who produce and create content. This study categorises the rest of users as: 'critics' (19%), 'collectors' (15%), 'joiners' (19%), passive spectators (33%) (van Dijck 2009). Another report on The Guardian said: "[I]f you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will 'interact' with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it" (Arthur 2006, p.69).Therefore, when we think of online activism and netizens' participation during the pre- and post-election period we should consider that the Iranian users' communities were still able to follow the abovementioned categorisations of user participation in their own way.

The Green Movement's Case

As a new social movement, the Green Movement has been extensively engaging with media and information technologies. ICTs were used by the Movement's sympathisers who were mostly well-educated and professionals familiar with using digital tools for years. The government, on the other side of the conflict, has extensive capabilities and professional forces who could confront the protesters in cyberspace, at least, to some extent. The signs of the post-election cyberwar between these two sides first appeared during the campaign period, when the internet and its assets clearly changed the way elections 'looked' compared with previous years.

All four candidates for the presidency engaged with cyberspace to some extent during the campaign period. Although, Ahmadinejad and his campaign had the lowest online presence, his "campaign blog (Ahmadinejad.ir) kept his supporters up to date, responded to political spin, and took donations in support of his campaign" (Howard 2011, p.5). His other key website was *emtedademehr.com* where one could find fundraising forms, news, invitations for online collaboration, and proposed slogans for supporters' gatherings. The other conservative candidate, Mohsen Rezaee, reconstructed his official website (rezaee.ir) and activated an online campaign. The reformist candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, who used *Tagheer* [change] as his campaign's slogan, launched his campaign's website (tagheer.com)(Moghanizadeh 2013, p.17). The campaign of Mirhossein Mousavi, who was the main rival of Ahmadinejad, used cyberspace more comprehensively and creatively than the other candidates. His campaign published the newspaper, *Kalameye Sabz* [The Green Word] and "ran two websites named Kalameh and Ghalamnews"(Moghanizadeh 2013, p.17). Mousavi's campaign also established a website called *GhalamSima* ('Ghalam' means pen and 'Sima' means vision) which was an online TV channel. GhalamSima was blocked by the government 48 hours prior to the election (Peykeiran 2009; Aftab 2009). As Howard stated:

> [Mousavi's campaign] use of digital campaign tools was a strategic
> response to his exclusion from coverage by state-run television and
> newspapers. He used Facebook (www.facebook.com/mousavi) to reach out
> to voters, alert them of his public appearances, and help them build a sense
> of community. Months after the election, he maintained a dedicated

YouTube channel and Twitter feed. (2011, p.5)

In a very short time after Mousavi's fan page on Facebook was launched, many celebrities and famous Iranian Facebook pages supported him. As a result, the number of Mousavi's fans rose markedly. His page had more than 100,000 members in January 2011 (Moghanizadeh 2013, p.17). At the time of writing, this page has about 400,000 members; having said that, a large number people left this page during the crisis period due to political risks.

The supporters of Ahmadinejad, the Supreme Leader's favoured candidate, lagged behind in joining cyberspace during the campaign period for two main reasons. First, their campaign had unconditional access to all public media (including national radio and television) and they did not feel the need for more online activity. Secondly, there was a lack of knowledge about, and underestimation of, the potential of digital technologies in the conservative campaigns. International commentators were fascinated with the use of social media by the Green protesters and the User-Generated Content disseminated through the internet. Various green elements in profiles and pages signalled support for Mousavi. Different social networks, one after another, very quickly witnessed these changes in colours. For example, on Facebook, users put various green tonalities (Fig. 1.2) on their profile pictures or pictures showing them wearing a green element, such as a green scarf or T-Shirt.

Figure 1.2. Examples of typical Facebook profile pictures with green elements

This was probably the first tangible online presence of the Green Wave, which changed into the Green Movement after the election. The possibility of running polls, sharing news, articles, images and videos, along with virtual campaigns, were among the affordances of social media used by the candidate's supporters and,

later, by protesters.

Given the high technological baseline in Iran, it seemed to be a very logical choice to use digital tools during the struggle; however, one of the major reasons for people's warm reception of cyberspace and its features was the absolute monopoly of the government on older media, such as television, radio and newspapers. Although, the reformist candidates could access these media in limited ways during the campaign period, after the election, the government cut all their access to the established media. Moreover, during the protests on the streets, the government used all available media to first ignore, and then condemn, the protesters. They even used it to change the story to their advantage by calling the protesters "rioters" and portraying them as the agents of foreign governments. In the following cartoon (Fig. 1.3) of the Greens' Art collection cartoonist, Mana Neyestani, depicts the manipulation of 'goings on' by mainstream media. In the cartoon, while someone is killed and another person shouts, we can see the smile of Mona Lisa on the camera's monitor which implies peace and tranquillity. Neyestani wanted to show the fictive representation of events in 2009 post-election uprisings. In the case study in the next chapter, Neda Agha-Soltan shows how the state-run media was used by the government during the conflict to deliver a manipulated image of the Green Movement to the public.

Figure 1.3. *Honesty* by Mana Neyestani

Digital technologies were used in different ways during this period. I will now review some of the major tools and media that were used during the conflict period:

Digital cameras

Digital cameras played the most important part of documenting ongoing events during the crisis period. These were not necessarily advanced cameras; most times they were the cheap digital cameras that mobile phones have. Cameras were critical to the production of a huge part of the circulated materials in social media – appropriated, or original, photos and videos. Key moments and critical events of the pre- and post-election period were recorded by everyday citizens. For example, an amateur video (available at: greens-art.net/artwork/2342) uploaded six days before the Election opens with a view of two groups of people on opposite sides of a street in Tehran chanting for the candidate they supported. Then, a jump cut shows people from contrasting positions freely discussing political issues. Such important videos clearly documented the relatively free political atmosphere of the pre-election period. I recall people (including me) walking Tehran's streets chanting loudly against Ahmadinejad, without covered faces and surrounded by mobile phones recording unseen parts of the contemporary history. Later, cameras recorded post-election violence scenes showing the protesters suppressed by military forces. There are innumerable video files on YouTube showing people shouting "Down with Dictator!" angrily, but with covered faces, sunglasses and a bit of green colour in their costumes (for example: greens-art.net/artwork/375). One of the most important and affecting moments of the Movement, the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, is among this group of materials (available at: greens-art.net/artwork/383). While the state media were ignoring the events, cameras played a very significant role in documenting the realities of the crisis period.

Proxies and anti-filters

For the digital "disobedient objects" and raw information to be effective, a network of protesters needed to connect to the internet to be able to publish, share or appropriate material (Flood & Grindon 2014). Proxies and anti-filtering software played a vital role in building connections between people inside and outside Iran during that period. Software such as Tour, My Freedom, Magic Dragon and Ultrasurf

have been used in Iran for many years to circumvent the government's persistent efforts to cut information flows and censor the internet. As Sean Aday et al. notes : "… the combination of extensive Internet use and pervasive filtering … has led some Iranians to cultivate important skills" (Aday et al. 2010, p.16). In the same vein, in his article "A Twitter Revolution?" Henry Jenkins states, "The longer a country censors and the more aggressively it censors, the more incentive it gives citizens to learn how to get around that" (Jenkins 2013). After the election's result was revealed, along with its suppression on the streets, the government started to apply new and harder censorship of the internet. As a reaction, Iranian netizens used their previous experience of anti-censorship tools to keep their connections alive. As the leader of the Global Internet Freedom Consortium, Shiyu Zhou reports, "Usage of the consortium's software has tripled in the last week [10-17 June 2009]. It set a record on Wednesday of more than 200 million hits from Iran, representing more than 400,000 people" (quoted in Kristof 2009). By "consortium's software" he is referring to free software, such as Ultrasurf and Freegate. Regarding their function, he explains: "Freegate amounts to a dissident's cyberkit. E-mails sent with it can be encrypted. And after a session is complete, a press of a button eliminates any sign that it was used on that computer" (quoted in Kristof 2009). During those crucial times, software and proxies that provided users with safe connections to the internet played a very significant role in maintaining communication over the internet. These tools were so important to the Movement that it was likely the green participatory movement that we know today would not have existed without them.

Peer-to-Peer Connections

For several reasons (e.g. security risks, blockage of social networks, slow speed of the internet) it was not always possible for protesters to be able to log on to social network sites to connect with each other. They used emails and other digital tools to circulate material through older types of networking. While social media acquired many new users during the period, peer-to-peer connections played a critical role in maintaining connectivity during government blackouts. The possibility of sending off-line messages by Yahoo Messenger was one of the facilities protesters used to send messages to their different networks. This software, in

practical terms, became a micro-network in some respect. Particularly after the election, when the government was reducing the internet speed and making it harder to reach many websites, such as Facebook, peer-to-peer connections helped protesters to send and receive news and information. In that situation the remarkable point about the desktop application, Yahoo Messenger, was that sometimes when the proxies and anti-filtering software were not functioning and people could not even use their email service to share the reports and documents, this software was doing its job as a text messenger quite well, as most times it was not blocked by the government.

Bluetooth facilitated another type of peer-to-peer connection for protesters when the internet was not accessible. One of the offline tools used for circulating photos and videos was cell phone Bluetooth. In those days it was a hobby for passengers of trains to turn their Bluetooth on in train carriages to send or receive entertaining files with each other. During the protests though, most people were not interested in having fun through this type of networking; they were more interested in photos or videos about protests, speeches and demonstrations. Someone would whisper in your ear: "Did you see how they killed Neda on the street?" If you said, "No" then you would be asked to turn on your Bluetooth. Especially after the election and during that repressive period when many media, such as satellite channels or the internet, were not accessible, Bluetooth technology helped people to circulate the material. Otherwise, there would be a group of people who missed the stories of the day because of their absence in cyberspace.

Resizing tools

When it comes to uploading video and images, file size is an important issue, particularly in a country like Iran, where the government is always doing its best to sever the connections between people both inside the country and outside. In such situation, when there was not a secure and stable internet connection, a few extra megabits in a file could make it impossible to transfer it; a file that could be as important as reporting someone's death or torture. In such crucial moments, software technologies were solving the problem for protestors. A range of video, music and image editors (e.g. Microsoft Paint, Adobe Audition, Ashampoo Movie

Studio, WinZIP, WinRAR) were used to minimise file sizes. Even now, there is the possibility that many important documents are still located on personal computers and mobile phones because of their owners' lack of knowledge or access to such software. There were also older people who were only familiar with the basic uses of digital tools, such as recording videos or capturing photos; and also, not all younger people were able to use professional software to reduce the size of video or audio files.

Appropriating tools

The other feature of the image/video/sound editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop or Microsoft Movie Maker, was the aesthetic functions used by the protesters. One of the most important reasons for the volume of creative works by both sides of the confrontation was the availability of such software for everyone in Iran. As a result of global economic sanctions, Iran is totally isolated from international markets and trade. As a consequence, nobody obeys copyright. In Iran, 'pirated' versions of all the professional and advanced software are available, either for free or one can buy them cheaply. Although all the software are downloadable from specific websites in all countries, in Iran, one can buy a well-designed pack of hundreds of categorised and updated software with a printed manual from official markets for just $20. Because of this, the percentage of people who have access to software such as Adobe Audition and who also have the ability to work with them is relatively high.

Debate on the Role of Digital Media in the Green Movement

> You cannot stop people any longer. You cannot control them any longer.
> They can bypass your established media; they can broadcast to one
> another; they can organize as never before. (Sullivan 2009)

These sentences are taken from a well-known comment from the famous American blogger, Andrew Sullivan, entitled "The Revolution Will Be Twittered" (Sullivan 2009) that was posted on 13 June 2009 – one day after the election. This post is full of excited and captivated statements about the capabilities of digital media tools in

the hands of the protesters. Two days later, Lev Grossman from Time's global service called Twitter "the medium of the moment" (Grossman 2009) and listed it as being "highly mobile", "free" and "high speed" as the features that protesters can easily use for mobilisation and informational tasks. In his article "Why Twitter Is the Medium of the Moment? he refers to the American government's request of Twitter to postpone a scheduled update so that Iranians' communications could continue during the protests at the time (Grossman 2009). This request was confirmed on 13 June by Obama's administration. In this way, in Twitter's case, after a short time, the so-called 'Twitter Revolution' absorbed a widespread attention as a determining factor in the ongoing political crisis of Iran. As time has passed, YouTube and Facebook came to the centre of media attentions as well. "CNN, MSNBC, and Fox quickly heralded the emergence of the 'Twitter Revolution' and fed their viewers a diet of near continuous feeds of cell phones and Facebook video paired with running commentary from the newsroom and consultants about the impact of new media in causing the protests" (Acuff 2010, pp.223–224). Of course, the significant number of photos, videos, audio and information coming out of the country also played a significant role in creating such an optimistic judgment about the digital tools' importance in the hectic situation of the post-election period.

There is a consensus about the constructive role of digital media and technologies in the Green Movement. Howard sees a significance in digital aspects of the Movement: "Iran's post-election insurgency was almost an example of a digital revolution" (Howard 2011, p.12). He explains that the protestors' resistance, gaining international support on such a scale and having such effects on internal politics, could not have happened if mobile phones and the internet were not playing their role. Shirky also identifies the Green Movement as "the first revolution that has been catapulted onto a global stage and transformed by social media" (quoted in Anderson 2009).

Whether or not the Green Movement was a revolution, there was no doubt that the global attention on the internal crisis of Iran and, consequently, the international mobilisation against the government of Iran helped the protesters to resist. There were, however, two events that changed the focus of international attention. The

first was the untimely death of the global pop phenomenon, Michael Jackson, just a few weeks after the protests formed. His death distracted much of the international media from the ongoing brutal crackdown by Iran's government against the protestors. The result of Sean Aday et al.'s (2010) investigation on the role of new media in the case of the Green Movement demonstrates this idea. Aday et al used Media Cloud to compare four major stories of the time (including the Green Movement, Michael Jackson' death, and the Sri Lankan and Darfur conflicts.) The following chart (Fig. 1.4) "presents the number of sentences devoted to each of these four stories" in US political blogs and professional media outlets (Aday et al. 2010, p.23). As these graphs show, by the end of June, Michael Jackson's story gained relatively more attention in comparison with the Green Movement and the others, especially in newspapers.
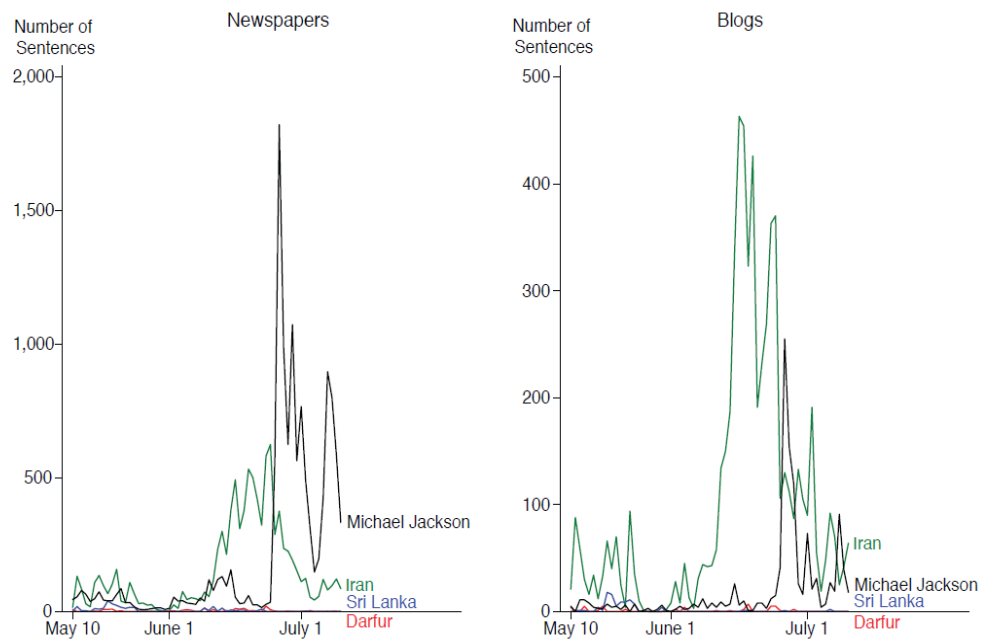
Source: Media Cloud

Figure 1.4. Newspaper and blog coverage of the Iranian election, Michael Jackson's death, and Sri Lanka and Darfur conflicts (Aday et al. 2010, p.23)

In the longer term, the multi-national Arab Spring across the Middle East and North Africa, in 2010, also overshadowed the Iranian protest movement. The sequence of happenings and lack of knowledge about the history and context of the region misled some commentators so that they took the Green Movement as an initiator for Arab Spring protests; something that implies the 'influence' of the Green

Movement on those protests. Among these figures is the philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo who claims: "[the] Arab Uprising had a non-Arab beginning in Iran's Green Movement" (Jahanbegloo 2011, p.126). The passage of time has given us a clearer image about the differences in the incidents' contexts and causes. As Nikki Keddie says, there were similarities in these two movements in terms of their use of the latest communication technologies; however, it was more about "similar responses to similar circumstances" rather than direct influences (Keddie 2012, p.152). This irrelevance is the reason for the nonappearance of Iran in news headlines after the Arab Spring began. Along with the rise of global attention in countries that were becoming involved in those uprisings, Iran's government thoroughly repressed the internal protests and controlled cyberspace by its cyber-jihadists (the paid or volunteer pro-government forces who act in cyberspace).

Before the Green Movement reached its peak though, the protesters' engagement with digital tools and social media resulted in many optimistic and, sometimes, excited statements on the abilities of such tools in moving towards the promised democracy.

Twitter, for example, received more attention than it deserved for its actual contribution to the Green Movement – based on statistics and reality, Western media's positive image of Twitter was a distortion, for the following reasons:

- Iran's complicated filtering system
- the absence of SMS service during the protest (necessary for Twitter).
- the sparseness of Iranian Twitter users during the crisis.

While Twitter had some indirect and, perhaps, some minor effects on the circulation of news by absorbing non-Iranians' attention to what was going on in Iran, it must be mentioned that only 100 out of 8500 Iranian Twitter users – reported by Sysmos (Sysomos 2009) – were active during the crisis period (Aday et al. 2010). Another statistic by Alexa, a commercial web data provider, also shows that "the ranking of twitter traffic in Iran is almost zero" at the time (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010).

The inefficiency of digital media services, such as Twitter, of course, made the Western media and commentators disappointed after the Green Movement started declining. That outcome went against their idealistic theses on the abilities of new media. Against claims that: Twitter did "what neither the U.N. nor the European Union have [*sic*] been able to do … A huge threat to the Iranian regime – a pro-liberty movement being fomented and organized in short sentences" which Morozov quotes when he is discussing the way Twitter occupied the headlines about Iran's uprising at the time (Morozov 2010, p.3).

A range of commentators have criticised the ideas of "Cyber Optimists" – figures who "believe that [digital] technologies may … lead to political liberation" (Golkar 2011, p.51). Especially when the protests faded from the public scene, negative and, sometimes, pessimistic criticisms about the role of digital media predominated in the political and academic atmospheres. In an interview with *Deutsche Welle*, Hamid Tehrani, the administrator of the *Global Voices* website, identifies people as the main engine of the Green Movement. Along with accepting the importance of the role of digital media, he believes that if the Movement just focuses on the internet, Twitter and Facebook, people will enter a virtual bubble, instead of doing a real protest (DW 2010).

John Rahaghi, a senior policy analyst at the White House, believes that "technology alone is no substitute for structure, leadership, grassroots organizing, and a concrete agenda people can rally behind" (Rahaghi 2012, p.151). He, too, sees the abovementioned approach to the role of technologies in such uprisings rather superficial:

> It is tempting to label a potentially revolutionary event with the name of
> one of these new media technology tools, but such superficial branding will
> fail to define what is actually happening or explain the critical integration
> into the larger process. (Rahaghi 2012, p.176)

Finding low-tech methods of protesters in using tapes to deliver information in the 1979 revolution in Iran was more effective than the Greens' use of digital technology, Rahaghi specifies the movement itself, its organisation, its goals, the climate it operates in and the way it uses the available technologies as the most

important factors in the movement's ultimate failure or success (Rahaghi 2012, p.175).

In the article "Internet's Freedom: Myth or Reality", journalist Mitra Fakhim states: "This illusion that the internet itself can make a revolution, has blinded the western governments and the NGOs" (Fakhim 2011). In the same vein, in his book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom,* Morozov calls the American politicians and media "simplistic" in taking Iran's case as a "Twitter Revolution" (Morozov 2010, p.242). In his paper entitled "Iran: Downside to the Twitter Revolution" Morozov asserts that exaggerations about the role of technology in Iran's political affairs comes from the analysts' lack of knowledge about the internet culture in this country (Morozov 2010, p.11). After taking the positive analysis as a misjudgement and calling this game a non-Iranian one, he goes further: "Foreign supporters of the Twitter Revolution managed to do what the Iranian government couldn't: make the internet unusable for activists" (Morozov 2009, p.13). Morozov is referring to the consecutive cuts of the internet and telecommunication networks during the protests. He is taking those cuts and interruptions as a consequence of the attacks on the government's online news agencies. This claim is not accurate. During the post-election period cyberspace was a battle zone. As the streets were totally controlled by the police, the government was looking for any chance to shut down the internet and other networks – even for a few hours to make them unusable for protesters – to stop them from publishing the latest information and news and, eventually, from organising protests.

In an article entitled "You are the medium", published by *Mikhak*, an online magazine, its anonymous commentator questions the power of digital media through referring to the very famous slogan of the Green movement: *You are the medium.* The commentator identifies this slogan as "the extract of the idea of this movement's activists about the form of the political protest" (Mikhak 2011b). *Mikhak*'s commentator asserts that emphasis on the role of digital media "… reduces the politics to a symbolic arena and lessen[s] the political protesters (human actors) to medium" (Mikhak 2011b). He/she believes that, in this discourse. The medium is not just a means of expression for the Greens anymore. Digital media were misidentified as the main force of protests – or the means that

mesmerised its users. This article goes further and asserts that during the course of the protests two factors transformed the "medium" to the "ultimate politics" in practice: the Western media's propaganda and the Iranian intellectuals' blind conformity. This commentator believed that the mixture of over-emphasising the media's role and this notion that everyone can express his/her political idea in micro-media (such as Twitter and Facebook), without considering the Movement's interests, prevented the Greens from reaching an explicit and strong expression in the public arena. He defines the "defeat" as the growing tendency of protesters to sit in front of computers and conduct their activities online. *Mikhak*'s commentator compares this attitude to the behaviour of protesters in Egypt and Syria who kept protesting on the streets. Ultimately, the writer does not see any bright future for the Green Movement. His/her thesis is based on the hypothesis that "new media could make citizens more passive, by leading them to confuse online rhetoric with substantial political action, diverting their attention away from productive activities" (Aday et al. 2010, p.9). The author eventually expresses his/her disappointment: "We should accept this bitter fact that you are the medium, we are the medium, but there is nothing to deliver" (Mikhak 2011b).

Reactions from the third group of commentators on the role of digital media in the crisis period has been less excited or disappointed and more cautious (Gaffney 2010; Carafano 2009; Howard 2011; Sreberny & Khiabany 2010). While they see some benefits in digital media for the protesters, they do not take digitality as an absolutely determining factor, saying: "[T]here are sharp limits on what Twitter and other web tools can do for citizens in authoritarian societies" (Carafano 2009, p.10). Sohrabi and Mansouri argue that, while the Green Movement was benefitting from the digital technologies, "profound structural change requires additional forces far stronger that mouse clicks" (2010, p.35) Karagiannopoulos, who finds the internet "an indispensable facet of contemporary politics", believes that it is essentially neutral and nothing more than a facilitator of the already-existing routines and practices:

> The internet can be the first, partial step towards engagement offline and even a parallel, simultaneous level of engagement during those political outbreaks. However, it cannot finalize a victory without actual offline struggle. After all, revolutions happened before social media, using other

communications means that did not characterize the revolutions they facilitated. (Karagiannopoulos 2012, p.170)

 In the same vein Howard believes: "technology alone does not cause political change—it did not in Iran's case." However, he accepts its plausible positive effects: "[However,] it does provide new capacities and impose new constraints on political actors. New information technologies do not topple dictators; they are used to catch dictators off-guard" (Howard 2011, p.12).

Finding digital media unable to play an independent role in turning a movement to a revolution, Acuff says: "While they certainly make social mobilization easier … cell phones, Facebook, and Twitter do not make revolutions" (Acuff 2010, p.222). Talking specifically about social media, Adey et al. believe that:

> Social media may reduce the transaction costs for organizing collective action … The networked nature of social media may undermine hierarchical, top-down movements and generate new forms of "flat" social movements … new media may change the political opportunity structure by publicizing splits among the ruling elite, creating lines of communication for challengers to engage segments of the elite in new ways, or by drawing international attention to local problems … new media will change perceptions about the real distribution of opinion within a society, so that others feel safer coming forward in support of a previously taboo position once they see how many online peers share their views. (2010, pp.10–11)

Investigating the role that ICTs play in social movements, Saeid Golkar suggests these functions for digital technologies: reduction of participation costs, decentralisation and distribution of media production tools, promotion of collective identity and creation of community. He put that such tools also "help movements to shape new models of contentious activities, such as cyber disobedience and cyber protest and political hacktivism" (Golkar 2011, pp.51–52).

Sreberny and Khiabany state that tools such as Facebook "became channels through which messages could be sent to international media organisation that had little access and first-hand information about what was happening in Iran. These sites also attracted messages and actions of international solidarity as well as mobilising the Iranian diaspora" (Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.175).

The social and psychological benefits of social media for the protesters can also be discussed. While the government was trying to isolate and undermine the protests, social media were helping the protesters to improve their social capital. Day after

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day one could recognise the formation of two essential elements of sociologist, James Coleman's definition of social capital in the Greens' online activism: "[as] having some aspects of social structure" and "facilitation of certain actions in this structure" (Smith n.d.). Along with the relative safety digital media offers, these capabilities placed more citizens in front of their computers and transformed them into online activists.

Beside social benefits, 'recognition need' can be seen as another motive for generating content online. As Louis Leung puts it, this need is about establishing personal identity, gaining respect and building confidence (Leung 2009, p.1336). While Leung's investigation was not specifically about people engaged in political conflicts, his findings were still relevant to the Greens' case. When the government was suppressing the protesters, ignoring and isolating them, social media helped those disappointed people be recognised inside and outside Iran. The circulated user-generated content in social media channels gained respect and attention for the Movement and made the authorities recognise them as a socio-political force – calling them "rioters."

In taking the Green Movement as a new social movement, mediated collaboration played a significant role in the formation and progression of the protests against the status quo. In his chapter in the book *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* Sandor Vegh defines three distinct types of online activism that could all be recognised in the Green Movement's case: "awareness/advocacy" in which "one sends information or receives it"; "mobilisation" in which one "calls for action or is called upon"; "action/reaction" in which one "initiate an action or reacts to one" (Vegh 2003, p.72). Through a more extended definition, Lievrouw recognizes mobilisation as "the most important and the most problematic, aspect of social movement development":

> We can think of it as what makes a movement a movement, the process in which people convert their collective concerns into collective action to bring about change. (Lievrouw 2011, p.154)

As she explains, "[T]he subjective experience of individual participants and their [micro contributions] are essential in the mobilization process" of new social movements. These continual contributions helped the Movement to maintain a

'permanent campaign'. In such a campaign "members participate or contribute on an as-needed basis." "Mobilization is not merely the collection and allocation of resources ..., it also creates a sense of belonging, solidarity, and collective identity among participants that is expressed through their collaborative activities" (Lievrouw 2011, p.174). Digital media were one of the constructive elements of the Green Movement by initiating and maintaining collaborations and translating the concerns identified into collective actions among protestors both online and offline. Sohrabi and Mansouri describe Iranian protesters' experience with the Internet thus:

> There was a cycle between the streets and the Net: people planned a demonstration, discussed the slogans and strategies on the web, actualised the plans in the streets and confronted the security forces, then turned back to the Internet and published the pictures, news and videos of the incidents, discussed the outcomes and prepared for the next demonstration. (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.28)

The various factors that weakened the position of the internet and digital tools in the Green Movement mostly targeted this sense of collaboration among online activists. Some of these factors were: the complicated internet filtering system, repetitive cuts in communication networks, a long list of cybercrimes (Peyvandha n.d.) by the government and the horrifying punishments for online activists and, finally, the penetration of the cyber police into protesters' online communities for the purpose of identifying operations and publishing deceptive information.

In his article "Why Iran's Twitter Revolution Failed" Antony Loewenstein (2010) repeats a critical question asked by Morozov: "[W]hat do we really gain if the ability to organize protests is matched (and perhaps even dwarfed) by the ability to provoke, identify and arrest the protestors?" (Loewenstein 2010). What practically happened while the Green Movement was declining was a clear answer to Morozov's question, confirming his idea about the revolution as a Twitter one: "A Twitter Revolution is only possible in a regime where the state apparatus is completely ignorant of the internet and has no virtual presence of its own" (Morozov 2009, p.12). Iran was not such a country. The statistics quoted at the beginning of this chapter confirm this. As Golkar states: "ICTs have provided non-democratic regimes with the ability to impose control and supervision over their

societies. This, in turn, leads to new types of suppression as the Internet gives

governments the ability to reach into the most private aspects of people's lives,

interests and relations" (Golkar 2011, p.52). Sean Aday et al. (2010) give a clear

explanation of the way Iran's government restrained the Greens' online activism:

> Of course, the protesters were not the only actors seeking to frame the
> events of June in politically congenial ways. The Iranian regime responded
> to protesters' use of the Internet in a number of ways. First, it has
> sporadically sought to block access to new media by throttling Internet
> access, disrupting SMS text messaging, and targeting and blocking
> particular websites where regime opponents are seen as having an
> advantage. Second, it has tried to create its own new media strategy by
> encouraging government sympathizers to blog and use Twitter and
> Facebook and other platforms in support of the regime's position. Third, it
> has sought to frame its opponents' use of the Internet and other media as
> reflecting their domination by foreign interests. Even if the Internet initially
> helped the protest movement, it later helped the regime crack down on
> this movement. (2010, p.20)

The severe crackdown by the government against the green online activists had a

significant effect on the ongoing cyberwar at the time. This parallel trend started

along with amplification of the security/military forces on the streets and continued

for a long time after the Movement lost its visibility. Given the lack of effective

leadership and, consequently, a systematic approach, as well as people's lack of

awareness about their online security considerations, it became easy for the

government to penetrate, identify and randomly punish the online protesters. We

also should not forget the significant technological competencies of the

government's cyber forces. Although they recognised their weaknesses in

cyberspace relatively late, they were successful in reconstructing and mobilising to

use all the online potential they had in a timely manner. Their timely reaction was

rooted in their access to human and non-human resources at that time. Two of

their most effective acts were the establishment of Iran's cyber police (FATA)[2] and

launching websites, such as *Gerdab*[3], to monitor and prosecute the online activists.

Therefore, as the networks became unreliable and information flows were

interrupted, the internet became insecure for the Greens. The intelligence services

of the Islamic Republic and individual cyber-jihadists spread this notion that every

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[2] Address: www.cyberpolice.ir
[3] Address: www.gerdab.ir

simple political act on the internet can lead the person to become less disciplined and so vulnerable to unexpected punishments – such as what happened to Sattar Beheshti under torture. At the same time, the military reactions of the government to protesters on the streets increased. In fact, the ongoing events on Tehran's streets were in considerable contrast to what Nicholas Kristof drew in the *New York Times*: "The unrest unfolding in Iran is the quintessential 21st-century conflict. On one side are government thugs firing bullets. On the other side are young protesters firing [tweets]" (Kristof 2009).

Figure 1.5. A cartoon by Kianush Ramezani that depicts two protesters who overcame the riot police using their digital tools

In contrast with the ideas and sentiment behind the above cartoon (Fig. 1.5) from the Greens' Art collection, the history of this period of time confirms Burn and Eltham's theory that "social media may have provided the informational sources" to seize the power "but not the force to counter the Basij's street violence" (Burns & Eltham 2009, p.306).

Chapter Conclusions

Digital media played a complicated but, generally, constructive role for the Green Movement. On the eve of the protests, the presence of digital media was enthusiastically welcomed by both domestic and global commentators and public opinion. While these technologies did not cause the unrest, they made it possible

for networks of protesters to form and mobilise. "Information technologies [were] a fundamental infrastructure for journalists and civil society groups, they [were] a necessary but not sufficient causal condition for contemporary regime change," (Howard 2011, p.4). With help of "networked communication technologies", the Green Movement was formed by "highly decentralized, loosely affiliated contingent networks that link a wide variety of groups, actors, and interests without imposing a single dominant agenda or a program of action" (Lievrouw 2011, p.175).

Positive reactions to the role of digital media in the post-election period were not limited to these commentators. The five individuals interviewed for this thesis have personally engaged with the Movement and they emphasised the constructive role of digital media over the crisis period. These interviews were conducted a few years after the eve of the protests. One of my interviewees, Ali, who is a software engineer, made this comment: "I believe [digital media] was essential to the Green Movement. I mean if they were not available, the Green Movement would not exist or develop." Reza, another informant, "knows digital media as the widest information network for [protesters]." Elaheh, who is a graphic designer, believed that none of the other available media at the time could be compared to digital media when it came to efficiency and speed. Other informants generally believed the same as Ali, Reza and Elaheh. I grade their evaluations of the role of digital media in the Green Movement from "critical" to "essential."

While the government's behaviour against the Greens' cyber-activism was reactive at beginning of protests, it gradually turned into pro-active and repressive behaviour. After the government's reaction to the protesters became more severe and the internet became insecure, the functions of digital media shrank to information distribution tasks. These media eventually lost their capabilities for mobilisation (e.g. organising an online or offline action) and, consequently, action/reaction domains (e.g. hacktivism and, demonstrations). Being able to mobilise people was a key factor for the progression of a movement, as discussed, above. Along with political and social reasons, on a domestic and international scale, having digital media tools undermined accelerated the decline of the Green Movement. The survival of any social movement is "highly unlikely" without communication tools (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.30). The

blockage of communication channels (in this case, mostly online) challenged the existence of activist groups who were developing the movement.

While it is true that new media helped forming the insurgency of 2009, it is also true that they did not cause a revolution in Iran as was expected; however, they significantly helped protesters in building a unique identity called the Green Movement and running significant online and offline demonstrations. Adey et al. state that while "online content was available both [sides of the conflict] directly and indirectly, it did frame the unrest in ways that favoured the protesters and disfavoured the regime" (Aday et al. 2010, p.19).

The history of digital media in this period also showed that Iran's government, even with its complicated filtering system and all its intelligence services, was not able to control Iranians' online activists. As Howard states, "Iran's street protests failed to topple their government. But just as important, the world's most technologically advanced censors failed to manage the government's election crisis. And the region's dictators have a new concern: their own tech-savvy, disaffected youth" (Howard 2011, p.12). In fact, digital media, online activists and user-generated content were playing their role efficiently apart from all the utopian interpretations of their placement.

Chapter 2: The Green Movement and Art

Once the audience is engaged [art] is the ideal place to explore radical and controversial ideas.
(Flood & Grindon 2014)

Art's presence in social and political struggles intersects with a range of debates about aesthetisation of politics, propaganda and political art, community and protest art, and with artivism – a combination of 'art' and 'activism'. In this chapter, I situate art's role in the 2009 presidential election by reviewing the recent history of art and politics in Iran and surveying a selection of the literature on politics and art. I follow this discussion with a summary of the types of art produced in the Green Movement and conclude with a case study of Neda Agha-Soltan and the aftermath of her death. I have also incorporated views from a number of informant interviews I conducted in this chapter.

Recent Iranian History

In Iran's long history, there have been many moments when art has been used as a means of engaging with politics. Four of the most significant events in recent history are:

- The Constitutional Revolution (1905)
- The 28 Mordad Coup (1953)
- The Islamic Revolution (1979)
- The Green Movement (2009)

Political humour, theatre and painting were used by the Constitutional Revolution's supporters about 100 years ago in forms ranging from folkloric songs to poems and

plays (Saghaei, 2012). Saghaei explains that anti-dictatorship political humour is one of the oldest means of expression in the hands of Iranian activists during the Constitutional Revolution. Malekoshoara or Mohamad Taghi Bahar (poet, 1884-1951), Ali Akbar Dehkhoda (writer, 1879-1956) and Iraj Mirza (poet and satirist, 1874-1926) were some of the most significant artists in the 1907 revolution.

In 19 August, 1963, Iran's popular Prime Minister at the time, Mohamad Mosadegh, was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the United Kingdom and the United States. Consequently, Mohammadreza Reza Pahlavi was re-installed as the Shah [king] with unlimited power. Following these unprecedented events, artists became more engaged in reflecting the political situation. The hopelessness and depression of the time are perceptible in the poems of Akhavan Sales (1929-1990) and the stories of Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951), two prominent writers of the period. Arguing from a formalist perspective, Iranian poet, Hamed Darab, has said that "the coup brought about public acceptance and growth for Modern Persian Poetry which challenged the structure of the classic Iranian style of poetry" (Darab 2013). Nima Yushij (1895-1960), Ahmad Shamlou (1925-2000), Nosrat Rahmani (1929-2000) and Siavash Kasraei (1927-1996) were some of the other artists who were aesthetically engaged with the coup, criticising it in their poems and writings.

The political unrest in 1979, which turned into the Islamic Revolution, was involved with protest art before the pre-revolution demonstrations against the Shah occurred on the streets. Ironically, the artistic context of the revolution was made possible by the general advancement of the country in arts and cultural affairs under the Shah's administration. Among the cultural achievements of the Shah were the emergence of modern galleries, artistic communities and literature circles. A range of artists who grew up in that situation supported the liberation movements during the pre-revolution period. Farhad Mehrad (singer), Khosro Golsorkhi (poet), Esfandiar Monfaredzade (composer), Iraj Janati Ataei (poet) were among the well-known figures of art at the time who created works to criticise the status quo in the Shah's period.

After the 1979 revolution, the Islamic government did its best to use art in the promotion of its ideology and re-education program – it was a lesson from previous

experience. Particularly during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war, art was put into the service of Iran's propaganda system. At the same time, all the different groups who were against the Islamic Revolution started to produce anti-government works. Therefore, during the whole of the Islamic Republic's existence, and up until the 2009 presidential election, art has been a part of Iranian political discourse and artworks were created using all available media and on every possible occasion. In the 2009 presidential campaign period, and before the government publicised the result of the election, a huge number of artworks against the current social, economic and political situation of the country were produced and published. These occurred in the temporary climate of relative social/political freedom of the pre-election period given by the government as a democratic gesture of goodwill. The majority of works had no details attached to them. I retrieved around 330 names of amateur and professional artists out of the works catalogued in the Greens' Art collection. Along with the artworks related to previous political events, the large number of archived works in this project shows that art has continued to be a means of expression for Iranian activists.

In many of the 24 categories of artworks catalogued on the Greens' Art website one can find works with satirical content. This is rooted in a cultural tradition. Political humour, in all its different forms, including satire, parody and irony, has made a significant contribution to cultural productions in all historical eras in Iran mentioned above. Political satire first emerged even before the Constitutional Revolution in 1905 when the first independent Iranian newspaper was published. Later, as Mahmud Farjami mentions in "Political Satire as an Index of Press Freedom" political satire played an important role "in creating political awareness and promoting the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–7" (2014). Over that time satirists, such as Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, Mirza Aqa khan and Ashraf Gilani used satire – in prose and verse – as a means for political expression. *Tolue Mosavar, Azarbayjan, Shabnameh, Hasharat-ol Arz, Estebdad, Nasim-e Shomal* and *Sour-e Esrafil* were among the popular papers dedicated to satirical criticism against the social and political issues of the time.

After the 28 Mordad Coup, in 1953, the Iranian press suffered from the lack of freedom of speech; however, "political satire was still a presence in the Iranian

press, with even better quality" (Farjami 2014, p.219). *Towfiq* was the most important satirical newspaper of the time; it was banned after the Coup and then republished in 1958. After the Islamic Revolution, in 1979, journalists and, consequently, satirists experienced a totally unstable political freedom. While the press were freer than in the Shah's period, the upcoming political events and the Iran-Iraq war changed the freedom of the press for the worse. After the total shut down in the early 1980s, satirical journals started to appear again. *Towfiqiyun*, *Fokahiyun* and *Gol Agha* were among these groups of publications. "The Press Spring" began with the victory of the reformist candidate, Mohammad Khatami, in the presidential election in 1997 and Iran experienced an unprecedented freedom in the press. While "the Press Spring" faced the new Press Law passed in the Islamic Parliament, in 2000, Khatami's administration (1997-2005) brought a relatively freer social and political situation for Iran. Along with journals dedicated to satire, satirists were given columns in other non-satirical publications. Iran's political atmosphere, especially after Khatami, has never been open for free criticism against the ongoing political issues; however, political satire, which had become a significant part of the cultural productions in forms of literature, music, cartoon, TV and Radio programs, has kept its position as a political lever.

As a form of political satire, cartoons have played a more significant role in the Green Movement in comparison with textual forms of satire. Farjami believes that the press inside Iran were generally more interested in cartoons than satirical texts in 2000s as "cartoons have more potential to be indirect and equivocal than satirical texts, and what is seriously needed in an atmosphere of oppression is discretion and flexibility" (Farjami 2014, p.230). This organised strategy of the media gradually encouraged people to be interested in this form of expression. Having some of the prominent reformist cartoonists, such as Nikahang Kousar, Mana Neyestani and his brother, Touka, outside Iran empowered the opposition groups in producing these kind of cultural texts during the post-election crisis. While before the 2009 uprisings political cartoons were more symbolic and abstract, to prevent getting censored by the government, some anonymous cartoonists inside Iran were also producing cartoons in support of the Green Movement. On the other side of the battle, the propaganda system of the state published several cartoons against the Green

Movement and its leaders and used its various media outlets and press channels to publish them.

Along with mainstream media and the press, satirical attitudes towards every cultural, social and political issue have become a common practice for everyday Iranian citizens. With every new socially, culturally or politically significant issue, we have witnessed a wide variety of cultural texts, including jokes and cartoons, made by people circulating in public. The development of digital media in the last decade has enabled Iranians to establish their own personal channels and connections and, consequently, increase their contribution to the production and circulation of cultural materials with satirical themes. This is why one can find a wide range of user-generated content of this sort on the Greens' Art website.

Debate on the Role of Art in Politics

Most movements, revolutions or wars – especially contemporary ones – have made artistic contributions to global art history. The associated artworks have represented the engaged groups' voices, thoughts and interests. They "possess agency in themselves, but make change as part of ecologies composed also of other objects, music, performing bodies, technology, laws, organizations and affects" (Flood & Grindon 2014, p.15). In this regard, art has been applied by both governments and activists throughout history. The most well-known examples for the government's side are the Soviet Union's socialist, realist school and the Nazi's propaganda system. Since the 1979 revolution, the Iranian government has maintained a similar authoritarian strategy in using art in its political discourse. The increasing centrality of religion since 1979 provides a particularly exemplary example in Iran's recent history. As I mentioned before, immediately after the Islamic Revolution art was used for propaganda purposes. The government established the Islamic Development Organisation and invested considerable effort (and the capacities of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance) in the control of social, political and cultural matters through a variety of means, including artistic ones. "The Islamic Republic's instrumentalization of culture and media began early

on with attacks on and the banning of Western and Iranian exile's cultural products and technologies, including Western movies, exile TV programs, videocassettes, and satellite TV" (Naficy 2010, p.205). The British-based Iranian media lecturer, Gholam Khiabany, calls it "Islamic Exceptionalism" which – along with "De-Westernizing" – "are the pillars of Islamism" (Khiabany 2010). These concepts were both in tension with the West's ideological influences on social and cultural affairs in the post-revolution period. The government tried hard to minimise the West's impact on every aspect of Iranians' everyday lives.

On the non-government side, there was a considerable tradition of artivism, both on a worldwide scale and in Iran's history. Hundreds of NGO's and independent bodies (with interests in anti-war activities, feminism, etc.) have been engaged in artistic protests. Walter Benjamin suggests that in a social context art can play a role in undermining social habits and has the power to put a politically passive population in the position of a critic:

> … Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses.
> (Benjamin 1936, p.19)

Andrew Robinson explains how "distraction" became the alternative of "contemplation" from Benjamin's perspective:

> Distraction is fundamentally social. It replaces the viewer's thoughts by moving images, stopping the viewer from thinking. Benjamin criticises the usual account whereby true art is contemplated and the masses seek only distraction. For Benjamin, contemplation is a kind of domination by the author: the work of art absorbs the audience. In contrast, distraction involves the audience absorbing the work of art. Reception of art now normally happens in a state of distraction, especially in the case of film.
> 'The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one'. (2013, p.2)

While Bejamin sees the "distraction as provided by art" as a key attribute to be used in political acts, such as mobilisation, Marcuse believes that sensuousness is what gives art a political power. Marcuse – again, from a leftist perspective – points at the "beautiful" which is associated with art:

> The sensuous substance of the Beautiful is preserved in aesthetic sublimation. The autonomy of art and its political potential manifest

themselves in the cognitive and emancipatory power of this sensuousness. (Marcuse 1979, p.66)

Art historian, Carol Becker, summarises Marcuse's ideas about the role of art in political affairs, as follows: "[A]rt with political aspirations should utilize the subversive power of 'beauty' when appropriate" (Becker 1994, p.123).

Michael Shank (2005), too, sees a significant potential in artistic approaches to politics. While he emphasises a balance between the logical and emotional parts of movements, he argues that art is able to provide activists with a powerful means to engage people:

> The social justice movement, in its effort to win hearts and minds, must ensure that the advocate's toolkit is balanced with both emotional approaches (to win the hearts) and cognitive approaches (to win the minds). Art activism – a term coined to reference activism that utilizes the arts – is precisely the tool for the job. (Shank 2005, p.533)

Underlining the emotion's role, Shank goes further and describes the way art works or should work in the hands of activists:

> The responsibility of the art activist, after accessing the emotional pathway, is to carry the social justice message from the observer's emotional self to the observer's cognitive self … When both emotional and cognitive pathways have been accessed, exercised, and challenged, the winning of the hearts and minds begins. (Shank 2005, p.534)

He recognises two artistic approaches for art activists who are acting in unjust systems: "[[E]mploying] art to wage conflict nonviolently when confronting powerful structures, systems, or organizations; or [utilizing] art to build capacity among the powerless and disenfranchised movements."

While the rise of twentieth century European fascism stimulated the Frankfurt School scholars, including Benjamin and Marcuse, to take the role of art in propaganda seriously, the matter has not been resolved. Different figures and commentators have extremely diverse ideas about the role of art in political struggles. While some figures (Cohen-Cruz, Benjamin, Marcuse, etc.) believed that art has a constructive role to play in protests, Josh On does not take artivism as a determining factor during political struggles. He argues that while art can enthuse and challenge minds, in the end, people have to act through their protests to overthrow the system. His article "From They Rule to We Rule" evaluates the role of

artivism in current political affairs. This essay is based on his previous creative project called *They Rule* which aimed to provide a glimpse of some of the relationships among the US ruling classes. He also asserts that artists have political responsibilities like anyone in society and does not put extra expectations on them (On 2002, p.369).

Mirhossein Mousavi, the detained leader of the Green Movement, who is a painter, has a similar idea as well:

> A painting can never do what a movement and protests do for an individual or a society. A brush cannot fill the gap of a collective endeavour to freedom and liberty. It should be said that, works of a painter or an artist, being professional or amateur, do not reduce his/her other social responsibilities. Just after having a faith in such responsibility his/her work can offer a way to the future and well-being. (BBC 2013)

In an interview with Radio Farda entitled "The Transfiguration of Artistic Reconstructralism", Hamid Dabashi says that society should not impose any political expectation on artists and a political agenda is not a necessary element for an artwork even during protests (Katozian 2010). Positions such as Dabashi's were controversial as they were fundamentally different from the expectations of the majority of Iranian protesters at the time.

The widely-read yet anonymous commentator for the *Mikhak* online magazine is more pessimistic on the role of art in the Green Movement's formation and progression. In an article entitled "Aestheticization of Politics" the author argues that insisting on artivism reduces the whole movement to a fruitless political act. He/she argues that this approach has transformed serious political matters of death and life into an enjoyable entertainment for people (Mikhak 2011a). From the author's perspective, while people were losing their physical presence on the streets their increasing presence in cyberspace, where they were either producers or consumers of the artworks, gave them an illusion of still being involved in the protests to some extent. The author states that this took them to being satisfied in their own minds and probably brought them a false sense of joy.

During Iran's post-election crisis, aesthetics entered political activism with the clear intention of mobilising the Iranian people, as in Benjamin's conception. Having said

that, there is a clear distinction between what Benjamin calls "masses" here and what we know as the Iranian 'people' or the 'public' during this period of time. The diversity of engaged thoughts and the variety of demands captured in the collected artworks prove that in the Green Movement's case we are definitely talking about a pro-democratic phenomenon rather than a leftist ideology and, consequently a Marxist interpretation of 'people'. So, based on a pro-democratic reading, the art of this period was, as Cohen-Cruz helpfully put it, an art that "directly responds to a controversial public action or is intended to challenge public perception about the status quo" (Cohen-Cruz 2002, p.1).

Production/Distribution

As protest artworks, the artworks produced in the Movement can be divided into two major groups: object-based works and process-driven works (Kerstin Mey 2009, p.202). At first sight, the object-driven works are recognizable by the direct appearance of protest elements in them. They are also non-interactive if we expect that the outcome of an 'interactive artwork' is variable due to its viewer's participation in its creation process. The artists/activists represent the wishes, hopes, dreams and pains of protesters in their works. The illustration, *Where Is My vote* (Fig. 2.1), from the Greens' Art collection depicts all of these elements. The colour red represents blood and pain. While a red hand keeps the mouth from shouting, a green bird, which represents freedom or the Green Movement, is visible in the subject's eyes. These visual elements are combined with a textual component which is also the most famous chant of the Green Movement.
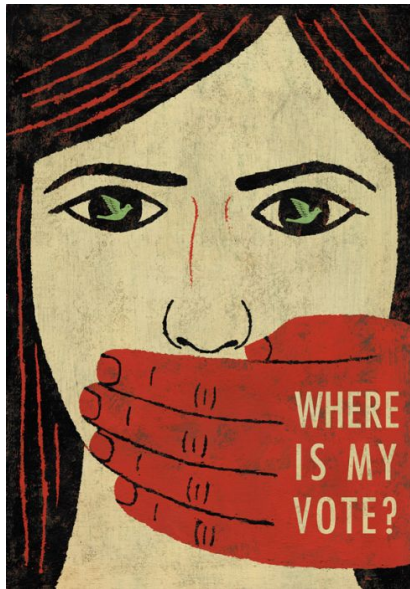
Figure 2.1. *Where Is My Vote* by James Steinberg

Quantitatively, such works – being visual or textual – are the largest category in the collected works in the Greens' Art database. Some of the visual signs of the Movement are green elements, the victory hand and the colour red that were used in different forms. Green, red and black were the most common colours used in the artworks of the post-election period. In the poster entitled *Neda's Cry* all three colours are used to visually explain how the government ignored people's votes (Fig. 2.2).

Figure 2.2. *Neda's Cry* by an unknown artist

There are three reasons for the huge number of works created through an object-driven approach: being technically inexpensive, easily transportable and with the relative security for individual activities in that unsafe and suppressive situation – over the time in which artists like Jafar Panahi, and many others, were dangerously penalised for their activities against the government. So, we find just a few process-driven works within the Greens' Art collection (such as street performances that were performed outside Iran). Having said that, the other reason for the absence of more process-driven artworks during the protests could be the need for an immediate response and the lack of time for producing more elaborate performances.

Process-driven works sometimes represent themselves in the domain of 'artivism'; a combination of art and activism. The artivist is often involved in street art, subvertising, spoken words, activism and protesting (Revolvy n.d.). More than the artistic and aesthetic agendas, artivism is concentrated on the social functions of art. Despite their similarities, there is a distinction between artivism and community art and, that is, the content. Although community art engages people to accomplish a work of art, as Cohen-Cruz says, it does not necessarily pursue a political goal. In the realm of artivism, the artist tries to make his or her audience aware of, or sensitive about, a political or social subject (Cohen-Cruz 2002, p.1).

There are different examples of works in this category produced in the pre-and post-election period. While the music and lyrics were produced and used in significant ways as object-driven works, they were also used by protesters in process-driven performances using non-professional actors as performers. One song, in particular, was *My School Mate*, which was sung by thousands of protesters who were beating their feet on the ground against the government's military forces[4]. This song has historical significance as it was sung by the activists during the student protests against Iran's government, in 1999. Another significant example is the graffiti and anti-government slogans on the cities' walls. The following figure shows one that includes the victory hand and a short sentence: *The Greens Are Alive*

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[4] www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhrIKaPsndU

(Fig. 2.3). Protesters were creating them nightly and the government's agents were trying to clean them off before sunrise.

Although, there was not a secure space for such collective acts inside Iran, beyond the borders Iranians enjoyed the freedom to undertake performances. The *Free Election* performances in the US[5] and Denmark,[6] along with the flash mobs in Paris[7] and Seattle[8] are the best examples here. These acts not only had an influence on their Iranian and non-Iranian audience on the ground at the performance, but also, delivered a sense of solidarity to domestic protesters in Iran who heard of the events through the internet and satellite channels.

Figure 2.3. *Greens Are Alive* graffiti by an unknown artist

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, one of digital media's functions in this period was to contribute to the artistic production processes. Two main methods can be identified in new media and art in the Green Movement: the digital distribution of non-digitally created works; and the creation and distribution of digital works.

Publishing artwork via the internet was, in fact, the most feasible use of digital media. For example, the prominent cartoonist, Mana Neyestani, during his exile, drew all his cartoons on a sketch board and published them through online media

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[5] New York's performance: www.greens-art.net/artwork/969/?lang=en
[6] Denmark's flash mob: www.greens-art.net/artwork/972/?lang=en
[7] Paris's flash mob: www.greens-art.net/artwork/961/?lang=en
[8] Seattle's Performance: www.greens-art.net/artwork/965/?lang=en

and on his personal page on Facebook. Shortly after the works were finished he scanned and edited them using software on his computer and then distributed them to the public. It was in the post-election period that an aged prominent poet like Shams Langroudi – whose professional life was engaged with the paper-based space – recorded his poems for the martyr, Neda Agha-Soltan. He named the collection *22 requiems for June* and published them on the internet along with the text version. In both pre- and post-election periods digital media played an important role in circulating such materials. The aesthetic outcomes of the Green Movement would have been unachievable without the distribution services of digital media. Especially when it came to amateur artists who did not have the reputation or communication channels, the role of new media was even more significant.

More generally, we should remember that, even with the freer political atmosphere in the campaign period, the public media were not very accessible for the artists who were supporting the reformist candidates. Moreover, in the post-election crisis period, even that minimal access to public media and newspapers was, in practice, cut by the government, so the artists/activists could not deliver their works to the public. This is where the importance of digital media tools in the publication process of an artwork – that is supposed to have some influence on the society – becomes evident.

The other important point here is the way the audience consumes media; the way he/she receives the work is a part of the form of the artwork. Without a doubt, the audience's experience of an artistic object is different when it comes to the medium. Especially in some analogue visual and dramatic categories that form in the offline world (e.g. stage theatre, street performance), the reception would be unlike the artwork delivered through digital media. For example, when the audience experiences a sculpture in a gallery or sees a performance on the street, his/her understanding of the works in that situation differs from his/her understanding of the same works watched on a monitor at home. During the crisis period, most of the artists considered this distribution condition when they were creating their works, either digitally or manually. The way they came up with a process was very similar to the way Ray Johnson's mid-century *Mail Art* practitioners dealt with

"distance": they, "turned the distribution process itself into part of their communal art practice. They thus made distance a space of movement, circulation, connection, collaboration and network" (Chandler & Neumark 2005, p.27).

Mail Art is an outstanding example of an exchange system based on a human network that was functioning before "the terms 'new media' and 'digital technology' became current in the context of the 'information society' of the 1960s" (Chandler & Neumark 2005, p.35). When "individual desktop capabilities were still more than a decade away from market readiness," Ray Johnson, "the father of Mail Art", was deeply engaged with his mailing activities called *The New York Correspondence School.* As John Held, Jr. explains, Johnson began his postal activities in 1943 by sending some letters to one of his friends. "By 1955, [he] had put together a mailing list of some two hundred art world and popular-culture figures, to whom he began sending moticos [coined by Johnson to call his collage works], cutouts on black paper resembling modern hieroglyphics" (Chandler & Neumark 2005, p.90). Using the postal system to send artworks, he initiated an interactive human network. As nodes in a network, artists from all over the world could share their works, send feedback and generally participate in common activities. "Mailings were affordable, reached everywhere, and could be used for either promotion or anonymity. They could convey mystery, blending the separation of art and life" (Chandler & Neumark 2005, p.90). In the Green Movement, the everyday practice of activists within the World Wide Web has been very similar to this novel idea of Johnson's. Instead of the postal system, the internet network was used. The context was completely political and the audience were all available internet users and then the consumers of other media (e.g. satellite channels) that were supplied by the internet. In this production/distribution system, the sense of 'digital reception' was taken as a key factor in working on aesthetic experience for audience.

Besides the distribution services of digital media to the Green Movement, there have been some artworks that were totally dependent on digital media for their creation. In this category, I refer to digital designs and digital paintings produced by software, like Photoshop, sound tracks produced in personal or professional studios, using software such as Adobe Audition, or video clips that were made by

Microsoft Movie Maker or similar tools. An example is the painter and architect, Soheil Tavakoli[9], who made several digital paintings to support the Green Movement. He accomplished all the steps associated with the creation process of his works, from scratch to publication, by some of the software mentioned, above, in digital space. In the digital painting, *The Police Truck* (Fig.2.4), made with Adobe Photoshop, Tavakoli recreated the scene in which a marked police car ran back and forth over one of the martyrs three times, in one of the most significant demonstrations of the Green Movement, the Bloody Ashoora.

Figure 2.4. *The Police Truck* by Soheil Tavakoli

Another case is the prominent director; Jafar Panahi's movie entitled *This Is Not a Film*. He made this film with his iPhone picturing his everyday life while he is on bail and waiting for the result of an appeal against his multiple sentences. The film was smuggled to the Cannes Film Festival and then published on the internet. In December 2012, *This Is Not a Film* was shortlisted for the Best Documentary Feature at the 85th Academy Awards. Although, these artworks were digitally distributed, their main difference from the first category is in the production domain. During the Green Movement, we saw a range of similar examples that have had an essential dependency on digital media.

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[9] Soheil Tavakoli's page on the Greens' Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/21/?lang=en

Informants' Contribution to the Context

Art played many roles for the Green Movement. In the first instance, however, one of the main roles of artworks for the Green Movement was the role that they played as news media and sources of information. Particularly among the works that were distributed digitally, this function is more recognisable. In addition to their aesthetic aspects these artistic products were, in a way, performing as informative media themselves. They conformed to what the American-based researcher, Sandor Vegh (2003) describes as online activism's dimensions: awareness/advocacy, mobilisation and action/reaction tasks. Although, the associated artworks were engaged with all the domains mentioned above, they played a more significant role in the information and advocacy area. Looking at the volume of this genre's works (Fig. 2.5) in the Green's Art database one can see this dominance.

Figure 2.5. Two examples of the information/advocacy domain's works by Elham Asadi and David Tartakover, respectively

Sometimes, the information/advocacy tasks were implemented very directly and explicitly. For example, in a typical video clip of this sort the audience could watch the images of the martyrs mixed with provocative music and an invitation for a demonstration in the future[10]; or a poster was made with information about the coming protest inviting potential protesters to attend. The following poster includes a textual invitation to the demonstration of the Student Day mixed with a drawing of a flying dove, as a symbol of peace and freedom (Fig. 2.6).

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[10] 13th Aban's Appeal (video clip): www.greens-art.net/artwork/105

Figure 2.6. *We'll Stay on the Streets Together* was made by an unknown artist for the Student Day

Besides such works with explicit statements and directives, there are many graphic and image-based messages that relied on visual signals for their meaning. Neyestani – whose cartoons can be included in this category – is one of the most productive artists in this period. In one of his cartoons, he portrays a mother who is playing with her daughter and little boy while she is shackled (Fig. 2.7). This cartoon references, Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent lawyer of political prisoners who was, herself, on a hunger strike in prison. It gives a visual message and provokes thoughts about her situation. Neyestani's works clearly reflect his sensitivity and commitment to the ongoing events and incidents in Iran at the time.[11] While news of the day gradually faded and ended up in archives, people are still sharing Neyestani's works to remember the past.
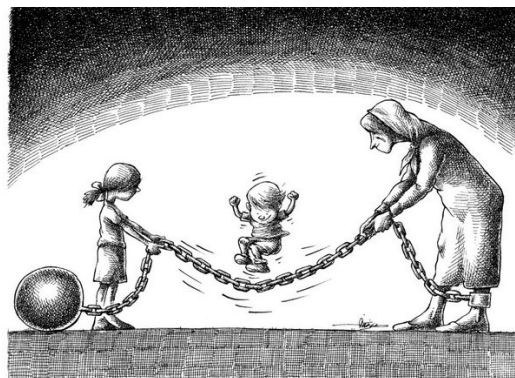

Figure 2.7. *Joy Time-for Nasrin Sotoudeh* by Mana Neyestani depicting Sodoudeh playing with her children while she is in chains

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[11] Mana Neyestani's page on the Greens' Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/10/?lang=en

One of my informants, Elaheh, describes the content of the crisis period's artworks: "The pre-election works were talking about freedom, liberation, peace and purity." She believes that after the election and by the beginning of the protests the content of artworks became more serious: "The artworks were full of some new elements such as blood and revenge." Nader found the pre-election artworks' messages very implicit and conservative. He believes that the post-election works had more explicit messages and made the artists' political position clearer and this frankness is the main difference between the pre- and post-election works. In line with Nader, Hana, too, stated that the pre-election works were conservative: "As a prominent feature in works the 'protest' was more tangible after the election."

Looking at the collected material on the Greens' Art website and analysing the content of works gave us a similar idea. Earlier, these works were uniting people by trying to increase the popularity of the reformist candidates and making a voice against the government in the campaign period. In the post-election period though, the artworks gradually became more radical, more critical and, to some extent, revolutionary.

Beyond their informational role, the way that Marcuse's "sensuousness" and Becker's definition of "subversive power" of beauty can be applied to the political conflicts in Tehran needed to be investigated. Was art able to convince anyone to take a risk or prompt a specific act during the conflict period? I asked the informants if they were affected by an artwork in this way. Although, their responses were different, all the informants believed that art made them act during that time. Hana described it as getting motivated by specific paintings: "I remember a young girl's paintings. The themes were a girl with a green scarf shouting 'God is Greater' on the roofs. Those lovely paintings were motivating me."

While he does not have any faith in demonstrations on the streets, Nader believes that artworks could have an informative role, could be a means of awareness: "Artists such as Mana Neyestani, Arash Sobhani[12], Shahin Najafi[13] and Mohsen

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[12] Kiosk's page on the Greens' Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/8/?lang=en
[13] Shahin Najafi's page on the Green's Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/17/?lang=en

Namjoo[14] played a significant role reminding people of the recent history and incidents." So, he could use what he learned from the artworks in making others aware of the situation. There were more explicit reactions as well. Ali said that five months after the election, he decided to stop following the Movement. Later, after listening to the song, *Homeland*, by Homayoun Shajarian, he got so excited and his mind suddenly changed about his decision: "... it moved me in a way that I returned to the Movement." Another informant, Reza, explained that a video clip showing people's resistance against the military services made him participate in one of the demonstrations at the beginning of 2010. Elaheh had an experience similar to Reza's after she saw the following poster (Fig. 2.8) and went to the streets. In this piece of work the artist showed how united people can encounter the enemy. She said: "I wish I could have heard Aria Aramnejad's songs[15] in 2009. If I heard them, I am sure that I would have gone to the streets to shout every day."

Figure 2.8. Graphic art by an unknown artist that demonstrates the power of unity

Marcuse's "sensuousness" was not the only constitutive element of art's position in the Green Movement. The presence of artistic activity in Mousavi's campaign front, before and after the election, was partly due to the cultural and artistic character of his campaign. To understand art's wider significance in this period, I now discuss the cultural basis of the Movement.

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[14] Mohsen Namjoo's page on the Greens' Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/14/?lang=en

[15] Aria Aramnejad's page on the Greens' Art website: www.greens-art.net/artist/2/?lang=en

Cultural Basis of the Green Movement

Mirhossein Mousavi was a painter and architect, alongside his political activism, during the Shah's time and, as Prime Minister, during the Iran-Iraq war. After Ayatollah Khomeini died (1989) and the Prime Minister's position was eliminated, Mousavi's political life was placed on hold and he worked as a university lecturer in the field of urban planning and architecture. Later, when the Iranian Art Academy was established, in 1999, he was selected as its President, a position he held until 2009. His wife, Zahra Rahnavard, is a sculptor who holds a PhD in art and is well published in the fields of culture and art. This background informed the Green Movement and Mousavi's campaign.

The involvement of celebrities from the cinema, television and music in the reformist campaigns of Mousavi and Karoubi was another point that should be considered. Reza, one of my informants, emphasised this. Highly regarded in Iranian society, artists were centrally involved in reformist campaigns and, later, in the Green Movement. One of the first connections between people and the Green Wave formed after some famous artists; for example, Fatemeh Motamed Aria (actress), Asghar Farhadi (director) and Darioush Mehrjooei (director), declared their support. Artists were engaged with the broader public discourse at different levels and through different means, in addition to their artistic contributions. Some appeared in advertisements and others accompanied people on the streets as a sign of their endorsement[16]. Their appearances helped the Green campaign to gain public attention very quickly. In an unprecedented act, more than eight hundred cinema and television artists announced their support of Mirhossein Mousavi's candidature in a letter published in the newspapers (AsrIran 2009). At the same time, artworks in the form of video clips, graphic design, music tracks, poems, lyrics and paintings, were being produced and published each day. These works were welcomed by Mousavi's supporters.

The artists' presence at campaign gatherings and focussed political acts increased days before the election. This set off an alarm for Mousavi's rivals, particularly Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's campaign, and gradually they reacted. They started to

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[16] The Green Stars: youtu.be/z1BfqXTcFLo

invite non-aligned artists to contribute to their campaigns through every possible way, including alluring them and using different colours and symbols in their public notices. Eventually the artists who supported the Green Wave and, consequently, the Green Movement, or those who supported the other reformist candidate, Karoubi, gained in reputation and honour. On the other side, the limited number of artists who supported Ahmadinejad encountered negative reactions from people (such as, boycotting their works, ignoring their artistic activities, etc.); they included artists such as Mohamadreza Sharifinia (actor), Alireza Eftekhari (singer) and Akbar Abdi (actor). Those reactions have continued until now and brought about a decline in respect for them and, sometimes, their isolation from society.

My informants had a range of positions about the artists who did not support the Movement or supported the government during that period. Reza did not judge those artists who did not support the Movement but stated: "Honestly, I am not really positive about those artists who supported the government after those incidents and massacres. They stood against people. I can say that I am not following them anymore, even if I was their admirer previously." Like Reza, Nader did not judge the artists who did not support the Movement: "I respect people who did not endanger themselves for society's progress." However, among all the government's supporters he found fault with those who gave their support for personal gain but not with those whose acts were coming from their religious beliefs or a real commitment to doing what they thought was best for their country: "We must respect them. We need to find a way to make a dialogue with them." In contrast, Elaheh believed that, in that situation, not to support the Movement was equal to supporting the government; in both of them were cases of cruelty. In the same vein, Hana said: "I judge them. What they did is not forgivable. Their absence will last in my mind forever." From a totally different perspective, however, Ali believed that while nobody was committing an offence against the other, we cannot judge or question any of those artists who did not support the Green Movement or supported the government." He then went further: "We should also accept that there could be someone who does not like to contribute to a political protest. We should respect him or her."

Informants were all generally positive about the roles of art during the protest period. They believed that the associated artworks helped the Movement to:

- influence the public
- take the public's attention to social and political issues
- move people, unite them and maintain the spirit of protests
- deliver the messages of the Movement to the audience outside Iran
- reminisce about the events and incidents
- have the famous artists' followers in the Movement.

The reaction of Iran's government to the artists active in the period was one way to measure or evaluate art's efficacy. In the Green Movement's case, when people found that the election result was rigged and the protests began, many artists who had accompanied the Movement were arrested and sent to jail along with political activists and journalists. Those arrests sometimes ended with a pledge and sometimes bought the artist a range of serious penalties. Jafar Panahi's case is an example. Panahi, a prominent director, scriptwriter and editor, was sentenced to: a six-year jail term; a 20-year ban on directing any movies and writing screenplays; a 20-year ban on giving any form of interview with Iranian or foreign media; and a 20-year ban on leaving the country. This punishment was in response to his attempts to make a documentary film about the post-election crisis in Iran. He was convicted for "assembly and colluding with the intention to commit crimes against the country's national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic." His sentence was much heavier than the sentences of many well-known political activists who were convicted for the same reasons during that period. In addition to Panahi, other artists, including Hila Sedighi (poet), Aria Aramnejad (singer), Mostafa Badkoobei (poet) and Mohamadreza Alipayam (poet), were sentenced to jail or had bans imposed on their activities. Moreover, a group of artists escaped from the country and others who were already outside the country did not return to avoid getting into trouble. Besides its aim to make an example of public figures, the government's harsh reaction to artists suggests that they believed that artworks and the actions of artists have had an effect on the public.

Case Study: Neda Agha-Soltan

I have referred to Neda Agha-Soltan in earlier sections. I pointed to different artworks associated with her name, including Shams Langroudi's poems and a poster entitled *Neda's Cry.* I also referred to her as a martyr of the Green Movement. Here, I am going to use her story as a case study and reveal more details of her death and its effect on the Green Movement. In addition to the impact that her murder had on post-election events, I am also interested in the considerable contribution that artworks related to her have made to the Greens' Art collection. In this exhibition, alone, there are about 60 works relating to Neda – all primarily focused on her death rather than her life. These works span a wide variety of media: posters and illustrations, moving image clips, longer forms and narrative moving imagery, poetry, music and lyrics, paintings, cartoons, sculptures, graffiti and documentaries.

Who is Neda and what happened to her? Neda Agha-Soltan was born, in 1982, in Tehran. She grew up in a middle-class family, went to the university, left it before graduating and, eventually, worked as a travel agent. In contrast with what some media claimed about her being an agent of foreign countries or a rioter, she was an ordinary young girl before the shooter fired; an ordinary girl from an ordinary family who contributed to a peaceful demonstration against the result of the election. She was neither an activist with a specific political goal nor a rioter hired by foreign countries sent to Tehran's streets as the government's media[17](Aftab 2010) and Basij's members' weblogs (Baygan 2010; Fariborz 2010) tried to imply. Neda did not choose to become a symbol of anti-government protests; the sniper's bullet chose her.

It was 20 June 2009, one day after the Supreme Leader's speech in the Friday Prayer. In this Prayer, which was held in the University of Tehran on 19 June 2009, "he talked about the election and – the reformist – candidates' objections against its result. He warned the candidates and stated that all the blood, violence and chaos will be their responsibility" (GreensArt 2011). My friends and I were there in

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[17] The head of the human rights council in the judiciary, Mohammad Javad Larijani, claimed that Neda was killed by an agent of MI6 and he knows his/her name.

Amirabad Street in Tehran. In the hot weather of summer cars occupied the streets. The drivers were honking their horns, as in previous days, as a sign of protest. Groups of people were chanting against the government everywhere on the footpaths. We could feel the teargas and smoke in the air. It was hard to breathe. Riot police and Basij forces were sporadically attacking people, arresting some of them and breaking the windows of cars whose drivers were honking their horns. Like us, Neda was in a car a few hundred metres away. Eyewitnesses reported that she got out of the car and walked away from it, accompanied by her music instructor, presumably to join the protesters. Just a few minutes later the shooter, who was "identified as a Basij member" (Afshar 2010, p.240), did his job and the bullet lodged in her chest. At this moment, two other ordinary citizens who were beside her turned on their cell phone cameras and recorded her fall and death. Although both videos were circulated in the media, one of them has been used more than the other. This video, created by an ordinary camera, was recognised as the most effective and everlasting work of both the pre- and post-election period. Laura Kathryn Fish explains what happens in this footage:

> The video begins with the cameraperson facing the young woman as she falls backwards onto the ground. As she lies on her back with two men on either side of her, the person holding the camera runs over to her right side. Her eyes appear to roll back and her headscarf sags beneath her head. The camera is at her head as another man kneels besides her holding his arms out. The other two men are pressing her chest and the third man leans towards her face. At once, the camera is again distant from the fallen woman and someone's finger is partially covering [the] lens. The cameraperson again runs up to the woman. There is a pool of blood beneath her body and splattered over her blue jeans. Quickly, there is a shot of the woman's face. It appears vacant, her eyes are looking past the camera and blood is streaming from her nose and mouth. Throughout the length of the video, men are speaking frantically and one is even shouting. One man urgently addressed Neda saying, "natars" ("Do not be afraid!"). Multiple times, each more frantically than the preceding plea: "bemun" ("Stay [alive]!") In the background a woman's scream is audible. (2013, pp.60–61)

A few minutes later a frightened man came towards us shouting. He was warning everyone, advising them to turn back and escape. He was crying: "[T]hey killed a girl!" Of course we did not believe this and remained there a little longer. More riot police were brought to the streets; they were overtaking the crowds second by second. Nobody could believe that the Supreme Leader's warning in the last Friday

Prayer would lead to such brutal reactions against the protesters. It was a couple of hours later that I found that a girl really had been killed in that scene; her name was Neda. The next day I found out that she was the daughter of a distant friend of our family.

Before, during and after that day, tens of other protesters were killed – in even more brutal ways, by torture. But it was Neda who attracted the most attention. "Neda became a household name almost overnight; media coverage of her last moments was disturbingly excessive" (Afshar 2010, p.240). Her death was displayed and replayed through the internet, mainstream media (e.g. BBC, Al-Jazeera and France24) and satellite channels (e.g. BBC Persian and VOA) in front of millions of eyes worldwide and it stimulated a deep public concern about the ongoing issues in Iran. The events were not that straightforward though. Iran's government has tried hard to portray itself to the world as being peaceful and democratic after the 1979 revolution; they did not want to be seen as responsible for Neda's death in any way. Just a few days after denying the fact that the election was rigged, different agencies of the government, including the security forces, published various denial scenarios about Neda's death, attempting to dismiss it. Those scenarios, which were not necessarily consistent, were intended to divert the public's attention away from what happened on the streets.

In one of the most well-known scenarios in those days, the government claimed that Neda was still alive. The security forces tried hard to convince the similarly named Neda Soltani, a 33-year-old PhD student, to collaborate in this scenario: her Facebook profile picture was wrongly identified as Neda Agha-Soltan's (Fig. 2.9). Ms. Soltani denied this request and became another victim of the story and, inevitably, she applied for political asylum in Germany.

Figure 2.9. Both Nedas; the correct Neda Agha-Soltan on the right side

In his book *Making and Mistaking Martyrs* Jolyon Mitchell, professor of communications, arts and religion at Edinburgh University says: "[T]he 'visual error' made it almost impossible for Soltani to stay in her home country" (Mitchell 2012). Soltani published a book entitled *My Stolen Face* and explained the story of this visual error more precisely. The glare of the media focused for the second time on the story of Neda's death; giving us a lesson about how inaccurate searches and the subsequent circulation of a wrong picture on the internet changed someone else's peaceful life in a controversial situation.

At Neda's funeral, which took place under the surveillance of the security forces, I heard from some attendees that Neda's family had been placed under a gagging order. Despite a campaign of silence and misinformation, the processes of memorialising Neda through images and artistic representations were speeding ahead. Before everyone knew the real Neda and the right story, the wrong Neda's picture was circulated on the internet and people used her image in their posters during the demonstrations, both inside and outside Iran (Fig. 2.10).

Figure 2.10. Wrong Neda's picture is used to memorialise the correct Neda's death

It was only after several statements by family members and acquaintances that journalists uncovered the real story. The media and artists then used the correct pictures of Neda in their works (Fig. 2.11).

Figure 2.11. The correct Neda in different forms of artworks

The repeated playback of her death and the singling out her death for commemoration in images was a brilliant example of the aestheticisation of a martyr. Appearing in a multitude of works gradually made her death one of the most important, powerful, and everlasting images. For a long time one would hear something about Neda on every media channel. Home Box Office (HBO) and the BBC made two documentaries entitled *For Neda* and *Neda: An Iranian Martyr* and, along with professional artists and ordinary citizens, produced a huge number of works to keep her name and story alive.

Thus, while the government was trying to deny and dismiss her death, the word 'Shahid' [Martyr] was used next to Neda's name more and more. The fact that the Iranian religious and patriarchal culture has preferred to show women as mothers or sisters of martyrs, even during the Iran-Iraq war, makes the use of the adjective 'Shahid' for Neda even more significant (Fish 2013, p.24,29). Moreover, the martyr image was projected in the artworks of the period as well. There are just a few well-

known female Shahids in the written history of Islam. In this regard, in her thesis entitled *The Ambiguous Frame: Iranian Women's Death Images within the Islamic Republic's Visuality* Fish states: "Neda's case allowed for the potentiality of female Shahadat (Martyrdom) within the Iranian national narrative" (Fish 2013, p.59). The sheer number of artworks about her from the period validates this idea.

A commentator using the pseudonym, Fatemeh, looked at Neda's case from a different perspective. She asserts that Neda was not the first person who died in front of the camera "... but she was young, slender, and pretty, and so Western media images are obsessed with watching her die over and over" (Fatemeh 2011). She refers to the blogger, Tamara Winfery Harris, who writes:

> To show brutal images of the dead is generally seen as unseemly and disrespectful. Consider the uproar when some newspapers published images of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu in the early 90s. But deaths like Neda's we feel we must see, need to see. What does it say when we feel squeamish and protective about the deaths of some, but not others? (Harris 2009)

In her article "Must brown people be martyred for Americans to be motivated?" she states: "I think Americans are fetishizing video of Neda Soltani's[18] death in a way they would not if she [was] a young, blonde, American college student shot down on an American street" (Harris 2009). The co-author of the book *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age*, Sareh Afshar, believes that media downgraded, "the image of the ordinary civilian-turned-activist which Neda stood for" to "another innocent victim of a barbaric regime in some distant part of the exotic Orient." She states:

> The tendency of foreign media has been to show the new trends of how the Islamic headscarf is donned, along with modern Persian dress codes, to signify a modern Iranian woman – one who is ready and willing to leave behind her backward religious beliefs and become a modern [woman], making efforts to resemble her European and American sisters. Neda had all these qualities attributed to her without any actual confirmation of her belief system, religious or political. (Afshar 2010, p.244)

It is beyond the scope and focus of this research to delve into the Western media's intentions in covering the Green Movement's news. What is important here is that they were very successful in portraying Neda's death and the related materials to

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[18] Harris also had Neda Agha-Soltan's name wrong

the world. Iranian protesters used what these media produced to put pressure on the government in the global arena.

Over a very short time, the production and reproduction of news and artworks about Neda stimulated the creation of yet more artworks, including internet memes, inside and outside Iran. This trend was even reflected in the works of pro-government artists against the Green Movement. One of the most famous of these was a street theatre performance in Tehran, which suggested that Neda's death was artificial, something made and directed by the West (Fig. 2.12).

Figure 2.12. A scene of a street theatre performed by government artists to change the real story of Neda's death

A Basij member's targeting, citizen-journalists' presence at the incident, the capacities of digital media and the production of professional and amateur artists all combined to make an ordinary citizen who came to the streets for a peaceful demonstration a symbol for the protest against the government of Iran. The footage of her death – itself inspiring – has been remediated in all different sorts of art. Neda's case also provides us with a significant example of how art and digital media helped found a grassroots movement against the brutality and injustice of the Iranian government. Although it cannot be said that this was the only reason for people's solidarity, the contribution of art in the post-election protests empowered and maintained the existing atmosphere of kinship and brotherhood to a considerable extent.

Chapter Conclusions

The Green Movement has provided us with a rich case study of the role of art within an ongoing political conflict. In this chapter, I have explained that the artistic products of the crisis engaged audiences' and protesters' feelings and sensory perceptions more than anything else. By causing the audience's senses to work, these artworks tried to maintain the protests; to prevent the public from forgetting the bitterness of past events before the goals of the Movement had been reached. In other words, by means of art, the artists tried to record the events and feelings in people's minds as a 'real' memory while they had not necessarily experienced them. Therefore, one of the main agenda for art and artistic activities in political situations could be having such accumulated feelings ready to be utilised when it was appropriate. As a result, there were people who were never at Azadi Square, for example, but who will not forget the pictures – taken around it – of the first martyr of the Green Movement who was shot in the head (Anon 2010). They probably did not know Neda Agha-Soltan; however, the paintings of her eyes and the tens of works adapted from her death on a street in Tehran rendered strong feelings from a simple emotional experience after hearing the news that Neda was shot in the chest and died. Consequently, they felt much closer to Neda and her family. Such sensory processes made an ordinary, previously unknown girl named Neda, into a national hero, a lost member of millions of Iranian families.

What makes the Green Movement an outstanding example of art's engagement with politics is the quantity and variety of the associated works in both form and content. This abundance "served to reinforce the Green Movement's collective identity" (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.34). The quantity and the formal varieties of works were, in part, a result of the Movement's engagement with digital media. In fact, it can be said that for the artists/activists of this period digital technologies and media was a necessity rather than an option. Such new means opened new windows to tools and possibilities for them and people's contributions to the Movement. The works became significant, independent media that enabled protesters to build interpersonal connections during the crisis period when the established media were completely unreliable. Like other types of user-

generated content, the circulation of these artworks gradually helped the protesters create awareness in society. The diversity of content and the plurality of ideas and thoughts in the collected artworks make clear the Green Movement's democratic nature. In contrast with the artworks of the fascist or communist governments and movements there was not a dominant discourse or ideology in the Greens' liberal movement.

Chapter 3: The Green Movement and User-Generated Content

Spreadable media expands the power of people to help shape their everyday media environment.
(Jenkins et al. 2013, p.294)

In previous chapters, I have discussed different aspects of the Green Movement's engagement with art and digital technology. We saw how ordinary people and professional artists used the capacities of the available digital tools to reflect on the political changes after the 2009 Presidential Election in Iran and to facilitate their activism in politics. What were central in most of the discussions and case studies was the content people generated or distributed to express themselves. Although a significant portion of the materials were original, there were hundreds of appropriated, re-purposed or recycled works among them. Ryan Milner defines these "internet memes" as "multimodal artifacts *[sic]* remixed by countless participants, employing popular culture for public commentary" (Milner 2013, p.2357).

This chapter specifically investigates the role of user-generated content and its significance in the Green Movement. I locate Greens' Art somewhere between the aesthetic practices of 'fan art', the political practices of 'citizen journalism' and technical practices of 'alternative computing'. I talk about these three distinct domains, separately, and then discuss their commonalities with the Green Movement's case. Then, through the rich case study of the prominent activist, Majid Tavakoli, I focus on the role of user-generated content in a highly charged political context, which is so different from its role in politically stable situations.

Tavakoli's particular case demonstrates the phenomenal diversity of activist and artists' responses to a particular political subject. I demonstrate how his story was dispersed, how the meaning behind it formed and how links were created to other political issues.

When talking about what people created online we can make a distinction between 'user-generated content' and 'user-circulated content'. For example, Henry Jenkins et al. make this distinction in elaborating on the ways that the clip of Susan Boyle's audition for American Idol spread on social media (Jenkins et al. 2013, p.9). They look at the economic and cultural values and functions of sharing on platforms, such as YouTube. In this case, they found user-circulated or 'unauthorized' content more prolific for both creators and distributors. In the case of the Green Movement all material being created or circulated through digital media, whether authorised or unauthorised – materials that were used or appropriated without the artists' permission – is politically important and historically significant. So, here, when I talk about user-generated content, I am referring to both original creations and recirculated works.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines three characteristics for user-created content: that it is a creative work, that it is published and that it has been created outside of professional routines and practices (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery 2007, p.4). In addition to the criteria provided by the OECD, the content of Greens' Art archive also includes some professional works. Because of the political context and necessity to record history I, therefore, disregarded the level of proficiency or creativity of the artists, activists or ordinary citizens when including, or excluding, items they created in this research. In fact, quantitatively, non-professional works contributed more than professional works to this collection.

User-generated content can also be differentiated along a continuum from public to private. The most familiar ones are personal websites and blog posts, the content of social media, emails, Wikis, comments, votes, audio and video files, forums and tags. There are, also, other types of user-generated content with a less public presence; for example, digital games have their own user-generated content.

'Mods' or 'modifications' are "user-created additions and modifications to a video [games]" (Spohn n.d.). This possibility makes the ambitious gamers and developers able to change, add or remove contents that were in an original game (e.g. maps, weapons, story lines) to make it more customised, what is called 'partial conversion'; or sometimes to transform it to a totally different and brand new game, known as 'total conversion'. Other examples of such hidden contents would be those produced and circulated in private networks or companies' internal network systems. In the Green Movement's case, there are a large number of user-generated materials, including photos and videos, stored on personal computers. These materials have not been published for reasons such as lack of high speed internet or security risks.

The trends that began with the establishment of the first interpersonal connections through the internet have been accelerated with the features of the Web 2.0 business model. This new development stage of the internet raised users' expectations to do more than only writing for a limited audience. The result today is that no one can imagine the existing "participative web" (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery 2007) without its users' contribution: "[W]ithin Web 2.0, the web is seen as a platform for service delivery which emphasizes user control, participation and emergent behaviour and can be defined as a way of creating pages focusing on micro-content and social connections between people" (Leung 2009, p.1328). This change split control over the content of cyberspace between major media and users' micro-media: "On the one hand users assert their creative agency by demanding a greater role in content production; on the other hand they lose their grip on their agency as consumers as a result of technological algorithms tracking their behaviour and refining their profile" (van Dijck 2009, p.49). Meanwhile, hybrid terms such as "prosumer", "produser" and "co-creator" (van Dijck 2009, pp.41–42) have entered academic discourses and the products of "hobbyists", "amateurs" and "unpaid labourers" vie for attention with those of "professionals" (van Dijck 2009, p.49). Rejecting the adjective "viral" to describe today's media Henry Jenkins et al. explain that media became extensively "spreadable". What shapes the character of this spreadable media as they suggest are: "the flow of ideas", "dispersed material", "diversified experiences", "open-ended participation", "motivating and facilitating

sharing", temporary and localized communication", "grassroots intermediaries who advocate and evangelize" and "collaboration among roles" (Jenkins et al. 2013, pp.5–7).

There is much evidence that user-generated content play constitutive roles in different fields; from entertainment to tourism, from politics to medicine (O'Neill et al. 2014; Simms 2012; Weide et al. 2011; Freeman 2008). Among these possible fields provided, I have chosen two areas that were affected by the emergence of self-publishing and user-generated content and that have some relevance to the artivism practised in the Green Movement: science fiction fan culture and citizen-journalism. There is a body of work about fan textual practices and fan activism as well as citizen journalism practices. The digital activism of the Green Movement shares features with these domains and, also, the domain of alternative computing which depends on information technologies. In the next sections, I will draw some connections between these well-established concepts and the practices of the Green protesters.

Fandom, User-Generated Content and Activism

Fans have been producing artefacts, texts and fanzines (Fig. 15) inspired from original television programs and science fiction (e.g. Star Trek) for decades. Making new meanings out of cultural texts has been an inseparable part of fan culture that "exists in the borderlands between mass culture and everyday life" (Jenkins 1992, p.3) The artistic contribution fans have made to participatory culture – their efforts in generating content – is what makes fandom important to this study; however, the goals and aims of political activists are quite distinct from the goals and aims of popular culture fan communities. While they share certain features of aesthetic practices, the political agenda remains paramount for activists.

Fig.3.1. "The Star Trek fanzine *Spockanalia* contained the first fan fiction based on the show" (Wikipedia n.d.)

In the late 19th century, "Fans" was initially used to define the supporters of specific fields of sport (e.g. boxing or baseball) (Etymonline n.d.); however, its use has become widespread in describing the devotees or enthusiasts of various types of objects, products or people in sports, arts, politics, etc. Based on the Oxford Dictionary the word "fan" is the abbreviation of "fanatic." By definition a fanatic is "a person with an obsessive interest in and enthusiasm for a particular activity" (Oxford n.d.).

In his key work on fandom, *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins argues that "from the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined, unrepentant, rogue readers." He continues: "[T]he stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies" (Jenkins 1992, p.17). In contrast to such notions he sees fans not only as not isolated but also as very sociable; not only mere consumers but also producers of new meanings and contributors to the world of cultural production. "Fan culture is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement" (Jenkins 1992, p.2).

As 'textual poachers' fans get what they want from the original work, rework it, change it and produce new consumable cultural texts. For fans "a favourite film or television series is not simply something that can be reread; it is something that can and must be rewritten to make it more productive of personal meanings and to sustain the intense emotional experience they enjoyed when they viewed it the first

time" (Jenkins 1992, p.75). Some other motivations can also be added here. Works by fans could be a subject to talk about in their gatherings, exhibitions and conventions. These works are important in making and maintaining the connections between fans and fan communities. Reworking the original piece can give the fans a sense of belonging, allowing them to see themselves as a part of it. This process can be psychologically rewarding.

Fan practices have made the most of the available technologies and practices at any stage of history. Home video recorders were to make new videos through appropriating original works and popular songs. Fans immediately embraced the internet as broadband's speed could facilitate file transfers through email and other file transfer protocols became more effective. The possibility of having online communities made it easier for fans to catch up with each other while keeping to their routines with no need for physical attendance. Today, numerous websites, forums, Facebook and other social media pages and communities are in the hands of fans. Now, they can easily share their own artworks and electronic fanzines and these can be accessed by everyone, everywhere in the world, in a 'networked culture'.

Although fans have been serious players in the realm of user-generated content, "like the poachers[19] of old, [they] operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness" (Jenkins 1992, p.27). As Jenkins explains, they suffer from a lack of direct access to the means of commercial production. This weakness, however, does not stop them from trying to make changes to the cultural industries' decisions. Their enthusiasm, their solidarity and their active engagement with available technologies give them some social power to act against what they perceived as 'unwanted'. Fan Activism is used to describe this aspect of fan culture. It is mostly "associated with active fans lobbying for a content-related outcome, such as a program staying on the air ..., the representation of racial or sexual minorities ..., or the promotion of social themes in program content" (Brough & Shresthova 2012, p.2). For example, fans in the late 1960s pressured the NBC "into

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[19] Poacher: "One who hunts or fishes illegally on the property of another" (FreeDictionary n.d.).

returning Star Trek to the air, a movement which has provided a model for more recent attempts to reverse network decisions ..." (Jenkins 1992, p.28).

The form and practices of Fan Activism has many similarities to political activism. They "both are adapting in similar ways to new capacities offered by digital media" (Brough & Shresthova 2012, p.17). However, it seems that they also have significant differences in their philosophy. Some scholars underline this difference by excluding political goals from Fan Activism (e.g. Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport): "[Fan Activism] looks like political activism but is used toward nonpolitical ends" (Earl & Kimport 2009, p.221). Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova challenge this idea by pointing to "the porous boundaries between cultural and political concerns, as well as the overtly political orientation of many fan activist campaigns today" (Brough & Shresthova 2012, p.2). They suggest that Fan Activism can be related to real world issues: "[It can] be understood as fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content" (Brough & Shresthova 2012, pp.2–3). John Fiske and Andrew Slack assert that, "fandom's sense of solidarity... [and] shared resistance empowers individuals to make decisive steps toward collective action" (quoted in Jenkins 2012, p.1).

Tangible or intangible, fan communities are usually quite similar to established societies with their infrastructure, norms and practices. Their members enjoy the sense of togetherness, solidarity and, eventually, the empowerment these communities offer. In specific politically or socially charged situations, like any other community, they must be able to utilise their potential and mobilise against the unwelcomed matters around them. It must be mentioned though, that the relationship between fandom and activism is not limited to the fans that manage to run movements. It is also about activists who use fan-like practices. There are several examples of such movements in history (e.g. *The Harry Potter Alliance [HPA]* and *Avatar*). The *Harry Potter Alliance* is an interesting example that has engaged different groups of society. This movement "encourages young people to speak out as fans on a broad range of human rights and social justice issues through what the

group's leader, Andrew Slack, calls "Cultural Acupuncture" (Jenkins 2012, p.1). On their website[20] one can find the following invitation:

> The HPA wants you!
> We are an army of fans, activists, nerdfighters, teenagers, wizards and muggles dedicated to fighting for social justice with the greatest weapon we have – love. Join us! (HPA n.d.)

Slack believes that "any real-world problem can be mapped onto it in a process he calls cultural acupuncture … channelling passion for the text toward passion for social issues" (Kligler-Vilenchik et al. 2012, p.6). In his article, "Cultural acupuncture: Fan activism and the *Harry Potter Alliance*," Jenkins outlines the achievements of this successful movement:

> The group currently has more than 100,000 members in more than 70 active chapters across the world, organized and mobilized by Slack[21] and his 40-person staff, both volunteer and paid. The group collaborates with more traditional activist and charity organizations, such as Doctors for Health, Mass Equity, Free Press, The Gay-Straight Alliance, and Wal-Mart Watch. When the HPA takes action, the results can be staggering: for instance, it raised $123,000 to fund five cargo planes transporting medical supplies to Haiti after the earthquake. Its Accio Books! Campaign has collected over 55,000 books for communities around the world. HPA members called 3,597 residents of Maine in just one day, encouraging them to vote against Proposition 9, which would deny equal marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples. Wizard Rock the Vote registered more than a thousand voters. (2012, p.10)

HPA serves as an excellent example of how fandom can have an effect on real world issues.

There are, of course, many differences between fans with no social or political goal and activists who are looking for a change in society. While both groups usually have collective goals and actions, individual acts are also important for activists, especially in authoritarian states. For example, in the Green Movement, there were many security risks. Therefore, a considerable number of activists preferred not to be recognised by others. Green activists were changing their identity frequently or hiding it by using aliases. Such acts made the connections between people weak. Whereas what, initially, brings fans together is *pleasure*, *fascination*, *aesthetic*

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[20] www.thehpalliance.org
[21] Andrew Slack: "a twenty-something trained community organizer who has a background in working with troubled youth" (Jenkins 2012)

merit, *common sense* and *common interest*, what brings activists together is more often *lack of freedom of speech*, *a vital need for change*, *real pain*, *serious and complicated social or political problems* and *fear*. While fans can select between the different subjects of fandom around them, the target is usually imposed on activists. There can be some other differences as well, but we must remember that what opened the discussion about fandom here are their considerable similarities: their common techniques and practices around user-generated content; and the way the Greens created meanings and broadened their interaction with their community through internet memes, for example. What they produced were, "mediated expressions of members of the public" (Milner 2013, p.2362).

Besides the experience of the Green Movement with memes, the protesters of the Occupy Wall Street Movement expressed themselves through similar techniques. In "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement [OWS]" (2013), Ryan M. Milner shows the significance of the use of OWS protesters. He states:

> As on-the-ground protests grew in scope and prominence in late 2011, participatory media and memetic practices were employed for assertion and conversation on OWS. The aesthetic practices and humorous tone common on these sites began to carry populist perspectives on the movement. Pop texts and pop networks intertwined as individuals with the literacy to weave the discursive strands crafted commentary from everyday sources. (Milner 2013, p.2387)

Milner (2013) asserts that participatory media were central to the OWS movement from the very beginning of the protests. What OWS protesters produced through appropriating popular culture "are part of a media ecology that inspires hope for broader public discussion"; that can lead to "a more engaged citizenship" by initiating "more active civic talk" (Milner 2013, p.2361). In this regard, memes which stand for a single "populist discourse" can build a space for conversation among citizens which is necessary for moving towards a democracy.

Citizen Journalism, User-Generated Content and Activism

While citizen journalism can be described as 'subjective', 'unregulated' or 'amateurish' by professional journalists, its significant contribution to today's media environment cannot be overlooked. People use both established media tools and

their own personal channels, such as their blog or Facebook page, to share what they want to be heard. We hear about new technological frontiers conquered by citizen journalists. We hear about Tim Pool, who previously broadcast *Occupy Wall Street* for 24 hours straight, as the first journalist who broadcast the Turkish protests using Google Glass (Jeff 2014). In calling it "non-mainstream journalism", Saba Bebawi, put it in contrast with mainstream journalism. She uses "institutional journalists" for actors associated with the latter and describes them as "journalists who are paid and produce media content under an organisational structure" (Bebawi 2014, p.123).

Whether citizen journalism is taken as an alternative or complementary to mainstream journalism, both acknowledge the active role that citizens take in reporting events and analysing information. 'Citizen', itself, is a critical naming. Rather than "an inhabitant of a particular town or city" (Oxford n.d.), in this exegesis, citizen describes an individual in its general definition who is not necessarily a native or naturalised person in a specific state or country.

Although it has flourished in the age of user-generated content, citizen journalism is not a new phenomenon in the realm of media. Before the emergence of today's digital technologies and even before having computers, newspapers have had a section dedicated to their readers. *Letters to the Editor*, *Readers' Voices* and *Citizens' Voices* all remind us of ordinary people's contribution to the content production process in established media. Radio and television producers have long understood the benefits of having the audience in their media atmosphere as active participants. They adapted the idea by creating Listeners' Voices or producing different sorts of reality shows.

When digital, self-publishing blossomed, media managers did their best to utilise the new possibilities. With no doubt, events like September 11, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake played a significant role in making everyone aware of the journalistic potential of everyday citizens. Consequently, media corporations became aware of the power behind the diversity of resources and ideas that new technologies could bring to them and people's "random act of journalism" was taken into account (Kaufhold et al. 2010, p.515). Meanwhile, phrases such as 'interactive journalism',

'open source journalism', 'user-generated news production', 'Wikimedia', 'conversational media' and 'participatory media' entered academic discourses. "If my readers know more than I do (which I know they do), I can include them in the process of making my journalism better," writes Dan Gillmor, the columnist and founder of Grassroots Media Inc. (Gillmor 2006, p.18). CNN's *iReport*[22] is another good example here.

> At CNN we believe that looking at the news from different angles gives us a deeper understanding of what's going on. We also know that the world is an amazing place filled with interesting people doing fascinating things that don't always make the news. (CNN n.d.)

This service allows ordinary people from all over the world to sign up and publish their reports using user-friendly publishing tools. iReport enjoyed nearly 900,000 contributors by August 2011; these contributors had 15,000 contributions a month; and their posts absorbed 2.6 million views a month (Garber 2011). The *uReport*[23] service of Fox News, which currently has 287,823 *uReporters*, is another example here. These examples support Gillmor's idea that "modern communications have become history's greatest soapbox, gossip factory, and, in a very real sense, spreader of genuine news" (Gillmor 2006, p.46).

Citizen journalism is not specifically about how established media use people to produce their content though; it can also be applied in order to have a voice against the monopoly of major media and power in societies. From journalism theory, such acts have tight connections with 'watchdog journalism' and 'investigative journalism'. These sorts of journalism try to protect a society by providing and disseminating information "to prevent the abuse of power" (Marder 2008) and to give power to ordinary citizens to defend themselves if it is needed.

As elsewhere in the world, blog posts were one of the first types of user-generated content forms that Iranian internet users produced and distributed in public. In 2000, Hossein Derakhshan,[24] – who is known as the Father of Persian blogging – was one of the first Iranians to publish in Persian "by tweaking some settings in the

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[22] Address: ireport.cnn.com
[23] Address: ureport.foxnews.com
[24] Derakhshan was arrested after he returned to Iran in 2008 and is imprisoned until now (Wikipedia n.d.).

Blogger software configuration" (Gillmor 2006, p.141). *PersianBlog.com* was launched in 2002 and gained 100,000 bloggers in just two years (Gillmor 2006, p.141). Sreberny and Khiabany who have a thorough look at the history of blogging in *Blogistan* state:

> A combination of factors paved the way for such a rapid growth of the blogosphere, including the disabling factionalism of the central Iranian state and the ongoing conflicts between Islamism and Republicanism; intense pressure from private capital in Iran that had long relied on the mediation of the state seeking a larger share in the expanding and lucrative cultural industries; and above all, the existence of an already dissatisfied young population challenging the Iranian state and actively seeking a new order. As a result, weblog service providers in Iran – blog farms – have emerged as part of the economic liberalisation in Iran's communication industries. Companies such as PersianBlog and Blogfa are recognised online brand names in the Iranian new media, and these provide a range of services. (2010, p.32)

At the peak of the blogging era, Iranian users were one of the most active groups in international rankings. In 2006, *Technorati*[25] announced that Farsi (Persian) was one of the 10 most used languages in blogging in the world. Based on this report, 1% of all content was published in Farsi at the time (Ferasati 2006). In the same year between 300,000 to 700,000 Persian blogs were estimated to exist by the *Blog Herald* (Duncan 2006). Having said that, there were almost 100 million Persian speakers, in 2006. The trend of ordinary users producing content started with blogging and gradually a culture of online participation among Iranians grew. Later, that experience helped them to learn new user-generated content technologies (such as sharing and tagging).

Given that all foreign news agencies had been forced to leave the country after the result of the election was announced, such experiences helped protesters to find and/or distribute the information they needed (Sohrabi-Haghighat & Shohre Mansouri 2010, p.28). Citizen journalists made the most of the tools available to report the authorities' unacceptable behaviour while the mainstream media were only accessible to pro-government forces. While the major Iranian media outlets were trying to ignore the ongoing protests and change the stories to the authorities' favour, the real stories were circulating in different online networks and media. The more the government's large media outlets tried to disseminate confusing

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[25] Address: technorati.com

information, the more the people learned to obtain the right information through their reliable online channels. Bahman Daroshafaei, a blogger from a family with a rich history of political activities – currently living outside Iran – writes in his blog called *Agh Bahman* [Mr. Bahman]. This blog was one of the most trusted resources for many readers during the crisis period. In those days one could find a range of information there; from the list of people who were arrested on a particular day, to calls for demonstrations and live textual reports of the ongoing events in Tehran. The following snapshot (Fig. 3.2) from his blog shows the different reports from Tehran (sorted by time) collected on the 2009 Student Day.

Figure 3.2. Report of the Student Day in the *Agh Bahman* blog

One of the most significant examples of the role and power of user-generated content during the crisis period formed days before the largest demonstration of protesters against the result of the election: the widespread rally of the Greens from Enghelab [Revolution] Square to Azadi [Freedom] Square on 15 June 2009. Mirhossein Mousavi had requested permission for a rally from the Ministry of the Interior. When his request was denied his call for a demonstration was disseminated on social media and through email lists by activists and ordinary people. The result of this collective online activity was the demonstration of three to four million, mostly, silent protesters on the streets of Tehran, an event that was organised by online activists and reported by citizen journalists (Fig. 3.3). The

following photo from the Greens' Art collection depicts the end of the
demonstration at Azadi [Freedom] Square in Tehran.

Figure 3.3. Azadi Square; demonstration on 15 June against the result of the election

This was not the first event of this type in history though; "[Filipinos] at the
network's edges—using mobile phones, not PCs—helped bring down a corrupt
Philippines government in 2001" (Gillmor 2006, p.91). The 2001 demonstrations in
Philippines were managed by circulation of a text message saying: "Go 2EDSA, Wear
black" (Fig. 3.4). This short message succeeded in sending more than one million
protesters – mostly in black – to the streets (Gillmor 2006, p.92).

Figure 3.4. Filipino protesters calling for the resignation of the President

When Saba Bebawi discussed the role of new media in Arab Spring, she argued that there had been a tension between mainstream and alternative media in the reportage of events. "Mainstream journalists wanted to maintain the upper hand in conveying the events of the crisis, at the same time alternative media reporters had access to information from the ground and were increasingly becoming aware of this powerful position" (Bebawi 2014, p.124). While she shows how these two bodies of information used each other in their dynamics, she declares that "[this tension] is a by-product of the struggle over media power" (Bebawi 2014, p.125). This is a critical difference between the role of citizen journalism in the Green Movement and the Arab Spring. As this section showed, mainstream journalism has had a critical dependency on citizen journalism and more than 'contested' its role was appreciated by institutional journalists, as they had no access to the goings on inside Iran without their amateur peers.

Alternative Computing

The third aspect of the Green Movement's engagement with user-generated content shares practices with hi-tech digital activism. What makes this genre different from other types of activism is the centrality of technical know-how, coding, and programming. Leah Lievrouw uses the term "alternative computing":

> The range of activities that can be classed as alternative computing includes the development and distribution of free and open source software … as well as the planting of hidden bits of code or "Easter Eggs" in software programs to acknowledge the contribution of otherwise uncredited programmers or produce unexpected system responses, and publicly demonstrating the susceptibility of well-known software to viruses or security breaches. [It] also includes the development of programs or systems that elude or sabotage state or commercial surveillance and censorship, encrypt data and communications … More extreme tactics include sabotage directed against organizations that activists consider to be engaging in exploitative, unjust, or corrupt activities. (2011, p.24)

"Hacktivism" or "politically motivated hacking" (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.23) is a major sub-domain of alternative computing in which "the technological infrastructure itself becomes the arena for expression and social change" (Lievrouw 2011, p.100). In this mode of activism codes and technical contribution of tech-

savvy activists is taken as content produced by users. While 'hacking' normally implies a destructive and criminal notion referring to citizens' security issues in digital atmosphere (e.g. financial transactions, privacy), it works as an efficient force in the hands of protesters. The development of digital technologies and the growing dependency of major institutions on them, have lead activists to see them as new opportunities for protest and negotiation. In this type of protest "activist technologists design, build, and [hack] or reconfigure systems with the purpose of resisting political, commercial, and state restraints on open access to information and the use of information technologies" (Lievrouw 2011, p.98).

There are various types of digital activism with different tactics in history. Denial of Service (DOS), for example, is "a type of attack on a network that is designed to bring the network to its knees by flooding it with useless traffic" (Beal n.d.). The Zapatista Tactical FloodNet is a good example of DOS. This project was introduced by its producer, Brett Stalbaum, as "a collaborative, activist and conceptual art work of the net" (Stalbaum n.d.). FloodNet facilitated denial attacks to "an institution or symbol of Mexican neo-liberalism" (Stalbaum n.d.) by encouraging its visitors to participate in the process. This project "required users to download and launch the application as part of their participation" (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.74). There are few examples of such attacks in the Green Movement. At the eve of the protests:

> … the Iranian opposition organized a supply of proxy servers unknown to government censors and coordinated attacks on pro-Ahmadinejad websites and state media portals … The attacks were launched not only by a few university students well versed in the dark arts of hacking, but by an army of amateurs eager to learn the few basic skills that would collectively overwhelm the government information systems. Parts of the information infrastructure of major government agencies were rendered unusable, from the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs to the official websites of the police and Supreme Ruler Khamenei. (Howard 2011, p.7)

The international community of technologists also tried to disable the Iranian government's websites. The hacking collective, *Anonymous*, was reportedly (Akrivopoulou & Garipidis 2013; Halliday 2011; NLR 2012) engaged with the Green Movement. This group, "together with The Pirate Bay, a pro-online piracy and bit torrent site, and various Iranian hackers, launched an [Iranian Green Movement Support] website" (NLR 2012). It was reported that "some government ministry websites, including leader.ir, Ahmadinezhad.ir, and iribnews.ir, and government

news agencies such as Fars News … have been brought down using DDoS attacks"
(Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p.176).

In Chapter 1, I explained the significance of proxies and anti-filtering software
during the post-election. As Lievrouw explained, alternative computing can include
"the development of programs or systems that elude or sabotage state or
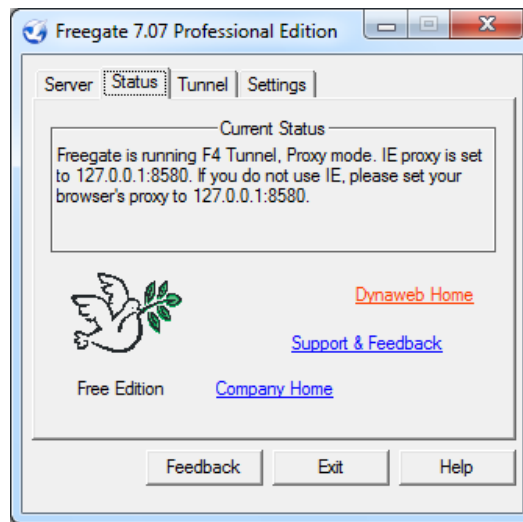commercial surveillance and censorship, encrypt data and communications"
(Lievrouw 2011, p.24).

Figure 3.5. Screenshot of Freegate anti-filtering software

Software, such as Tour, My Freedom, Freegate (Fig. 3.5), helped protesters to get
connected to the uncensored internet and, accordingly, be able to accomplish their
tasks as cyber-activists. These free online tools – usually produced outside Iran (in
countries such as Germany and China) – helped protesters to encrypt their data,
made themselves anonymous and secured their communications. Along with these
software packages, "volunteers around the world contributed by turning their home
computers into proxy servers for users based in Iran, allowing such users to bypass
the government's censorship efforts" (Howard 2011, p.7).

Here I look more closely at a case study to draw a range of lessons about the power
and uses of user-generated content.

Case Study: I Am Majid

Before there was *je suis Charlie* [I am Charlie], there was *I Am Majid*. Born in 1986, Majid Tavakoli began his political activities as a university student. What brought his name to the realm of political activism in Iran was, mostly, his rich contributions to the Student Movement of Iran over an eight-year period. His active engagement and uncompromising commitment during this period, although endangering his life, made him the symbol and "the honor of the Student Movement" (CHRR 2012). He was first arrested in 2006 and "spent 15 months in jail … on charges of insulting religion and the country's leadership in student publications" (BBC 2009a). Then, what brought him to the news headlines again was his speech at the Amir Kabir University of Technology on the first Student Day after the 2009 Presidential Election (GreensArt n.d.). On that day, he started his critical speech with this opening sentence: "Today is 16th of Azar [the Student Day in the Iranian calendar]. Today is ours! The Student Day! This is the most historical day for resistance against dictatorship. This is a day for liberation … We gathered here to yell at dictatorship …" After this impressive and provocative speech he was arrested by the security forces and brutally beaten by them in front of eyewitnesses (ICFHRII 2010). More than 200 protesters were arrested on the Student Day protests across the country (RadioFarda 2009b). Administrators of the blog, Homylafayette (Iran News in English), provide a long list of videos recorded by citizens in different cities of Iran on this day of protest (Homylafayette 2010).

After what was widely believed to be an unjust trial, Tavakoli "was convicted of several offenses, including participating in an illegal gathering, propaganda against the system and insulting officials" and, consequently, sentenced to more than eight years in prison (AI n.d.). Human rights organisations reported that he was kept in solidarity confinement for about five months in 2010 (ICFHRII 2010).

Tavakoli's arrest on the Student Day itself was, in fact, enough for the green protesters and the Student Movement's supporters to start backing him. The video[26] of his speech, his photos (Fig. 3.6) and the story of the arrest were circulating on social media and people's personal blogs very quickly (Anon n.d.;

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[26] Address: youtu.be/FQ0we42ziU0

Khorramdin 2009; Madyar 2009; Ghasedak 2009). Some citizens even extracted the video's sound and published the MP3 version so it was transferable through Bluetooth technology (Anon 2009). Soon after the story was published and circulated by citizen journalists, major media agencies like BBC Persian and Radio Farda covered it (BBC 2009b) (RadioFarda 2009a).

Figure 3.7. Majid Tavakoli giving his speech in the Student Day

As on other occasions, user-generated content produced by artists and online activists were disseminated through the internet to support Tavakoli. Angry posts against the government blanketed social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter. People wanted him and other arrested protesters freed. Paintings and posters, illustrations and video clips were all utilised by activists to make people aware of Majid's story and to show the protesters' solidarity with him to the government. On the following poster (Fig. 3.8), for example, is written: "We will never forget you … We are speaking in the heart of oppression. We shout out, strengthened by our beliefs. We stand alongside each other ... Majid Tavakoli, the dignity of the student movement" (Homylafayette 2010). It can be seen that the colours green and black, which refer to sorrow and sadness in the Iranian culture, and barbed wire (a signifier of prison), were mixed with his picture to deliver the message behind it.

هرگز فراموشت
نخواهیم کرد...

ما در قلب استبداد سخن می‌گوییم ما با تکیه بر
ایمانمان فریاد می‌زنیم ما درکنار هم هستیم...
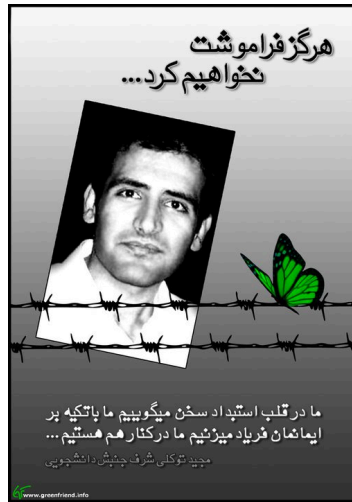مجید توکلی شرف جنبش دانشجویی

Figure 3.8. *We will never forget you*, an illustration supporting Majid Tavakoli

We have seen new artworks with general messages of support and solidarity for him being produced, especially on the anniversary of the Student Day and around his birthday (Figs. 3.8 and 3.9).

Figure 3.8. An appropriation of one of Majid's photos, a collage of hundreds of pieces of papers (RFERL 2013)

Figure 3.9. A painting by a non-Iranian artist showing Majid during his speech (GreensArt n.d.)

What distinguishes Majid from other political prisoners, however, is what happened to him after his arrest. On 8 December, one day after the Student Day protests, the pro-government news agencies, Fars News and Raja News, published some photos (Fig. 3.10) of Majid with these headlines: "The Images of the Main Leader of Rioters of Amir Kabir University in Women's Clothing" and "The Images of Amir Kabir University's Hero in Women's Clothing Are Released" (FarsNews 2009)(RajaNews 2009). They claimed that he was escaping after his speech by trying to evade security forces by dressing like this.

Figure 3.10. These photos from Raja News show Majid in Islamic chador and headscarf

In its report, Fars News ran two photos side by side. One was Majid in Islamic chador (Fig. 3.11). The other was a doctored picture previously attributed to the first Prime Minister of Iran, Abolhassan Banisadr, who was impeached by the Islamic Parliament on 21 June 1981 and, eventually, escaped from Iran.

Figure 3.11. Collage of Banisadr and Majid's images in Islamic Hijab used on the *Fars News* website

At the time, a rumour was circulating that to hide himself from the security forces Banisadr had escaped from Iran in female disguise. The government used this story at the time to both discredit him publicly and justify the actions taken against him. This strategy was efficient for the patriarchal and religious society of Iran at the time:

> Someone who was saying: Resistance! Resistance!
> Now escaped putting on headscarf
> He was not a real man
>
> - A rough translation of a slogan which was circulating among people
> (Rashidi 2012)

Banisadr personally rejected this claim several times (Rashidi 2012)(Anon n.d.). A photo of him (Fig. 3.12) in the same setting, which was released through the internet, raised more doubts about the government's claim. In fact, besides addressing Banisadr's story in its report in text, Fars News probably used this repurposed photo to visually relate Majid's story to Banisadr to probably stimulate similar reactions in the public.

Figure 3.12. The original photo of Banisadr

By publishing those pictures the government wanted to apply an old strategy to both humiliate a prominent political activist in public and make people believe that committing an illegal act forced him to escape 'like a woman'. As was widely reported, it somehow displayed the government's "vindictiveness and contempt for women" (Tait 2009):

> He had makeup *…* was dressed like veiled women, putting on manto, muqni'ah and chador. Although, he had a purse with him to guarantee his escape, he was unsuccessful and arrested by security forces. (FarsNews

2009)

Different reactions and interpretations stemmed from this report. In contrast with Banisadr's case, the majority of society, including protesters and ordinary citizens, never believed the story. People's posts and comments showed that most believed that Majid was forced by the government officials to wear that clothing and found the government's act unacceptable and disgusting (Anon n.d.)(RajaNews 2009). Even on the RajaNews' website one can find the following comments under Majid's photos:

> It's clear that he is forced to sit in front of the camera. When do you want to stop fooling us?
>
> These photos are just usable for your illiterate supporters …
>
> I did not have any doubt in his courage. Your disgusting behaviour just added more value to him … (RajaNews 2009)

What the authorities did with Majid was soon answered by artists and activists. The number of posts relating to him rose markedly. Inside and outside Iran people were trying to show their solidarity with him. Different pages in social media continue their support for him today. Among the more interesting are *Iranclubs.org* entitled *Supporting Majid Tavakoli*, and the Facebook pages *Majid Tavakoli*, *Free Majid Tavakoli* and *Free Majid Tavakkoli Immediately*. The hashtag #MajidTavakoli has been used in about 400 tweets since December 9, 2009.

Various campaigns across the world were trying to make human rights organisations and the international community aware of Majid's situation and show the people's dissatisfaction with the government of Iran. In this regard the most significant campaign was *I Am Majid*, *We Are All Majid* or *Veiled Men*. It not clear who initiated this campaign. I found two names during my investigations: Arash Ashouriania and Masih Alinejad. In a note on his Facebook page dating back to 10 December 2009, Ashourinia, a professional photographer in Tehran, mentions that his previous posts[27] in social media were welcomed by people. So he repeats his offer in this note and invites people – probably males – to take a photo of themselves while they are veiled to eventually be collaged with Majid's published photos. He reminds the readers about the way the government treated Majid and

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[27] I couldn't find these posts of 9 December 2011 that he is referring to.

says: "[T]hey wanted to put pressure on the Student Movement and the green Iranians. In the same time they are disrespecting our women. To prove our solidarity with Majid Tavakoli, and to say 'NO' to compulsory hijab … to prove that we are together send your photos to the following address." Then, he provides the readers with a Gmail address (rousari@gmail.com)[28] dedicated to this project and some visual instructions (Fig. 3.13) (Ashourinia 2009).
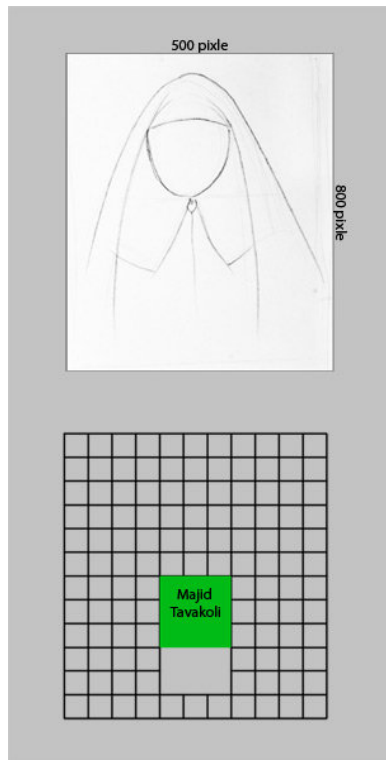

Figure 3.13. A visual instruction for people of how to take their photos by Arash Ashourinia
(Ashourinia 2009)

In the same day (9 Dec), Masih Alinejad, a prominent exiled journalist and the administrator of the very successful Facebook page *My Stealthy Freedom*[29] posted a similar invitation on his personal website. In this post she criticises the government's act against Majid and said: "[I]imagine if a part of our male protesters … wear headscarf. What would the government's news agencies do if they see a huge population is laughing at their act?" She also expressed her doubts about Iranian men and continued: "[T]he patriarchal propositions will not let Iranian men to do so" (Alinejad 2009).

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[28] 'Rousari' means headscarf in Farsi.
[29] Launched in March 2014 by Alinejad, this page shares the "stealthy" photos of Iranian women without veil which are sent by them voluntarily. *My Stealthy Freedom* currently has about 650,000 members.

In contrast to Alinejad's expectation, these invitations were welcomed by Iranian men across the world. A new wave of hundreds of photos (Fig. 3.14) depicting men with scarf, chador or muqni'ah conquered social media.

Figure 3.14. Men in women's clothing[30]

A few days after the first invitation (December 12), Ashourinia designed a poster (Fig. 3.15) using the images received and published two versions of it on Facebook. On the Persian version is written: "*Majid Tavakoli Was Multiplied, Not Humiliated*." In a comment under this image he puts: "The poster in a billboard size is getting ready. Look for a place to install it" (Ashourinia 2009). Later he published another poster with 400 pictures. In addition, individuals were also using personal channels to share images and support this campaign.

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[30] Address: www.greens-art.net/event/40

Figure 3.15. *More than 300 Majids*, a poster by Arash Ashourinia

People's reactions to the *I Am Majid* campaign were not limited to photos. As usual, various kinds of artworks were produced and circulated by people. There is a page[31] on the Greens' Art website dedicated to *Veiled Men* that demonstrates some of the works including video clips (e.g. *We Are All Majid*[32]) and graphic designs (Fig. 3.16).

Figure 3.16. Some of the artworks related to the *I Am Majid* campaign

The scale and volume of works contributed to *Veiled Men* brought major media attention to the cause, including non-Iranian ones. The Guardian (Golsorkhi 2009), the Huffington Post (Novin 2010), BBC (BBC 2009a) and Amnesty International (AI

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[31] Address: www.greens-art.net/event/40
[32] Address: www.greens-art.net/artwork/118/?lang=en

n.d.) are among the media and international institutions that covered Majid's story. These reports guaranteed that what happened to Majid was heard about not only inside Iran. Although he is still in prison, he has become a well-known political prisoner, internationally. In 2013, the Student Peace Prize was awarded to Majid "for his non-violent fight for freedom of speech and democracy" on behalf of all students in Norway (Iranhr 2012)(SPP 2013). What the Norwegian politician, Jan Tore Sanner, said regarding this award's announcement tells us that Iranians were successful in delivering their message to the world while the government was doing its best to disseminate a lie:

> With his own life and future at stake he is fighting for a peaceful reform and progress through participation and democracy. The prize is a clear signal to the regime that the world is paying attention. (SPP 2013)

This campaign was born and shaped at the intersection of three major pre-existing movements: the Green Movement, the Student Movement and the Women's Rights Movement in Iran. Perhaps because of this complexity, it became controversial even among its constituents. On the one hand, some protesters were not happy with the campaign's deviation from 'supporting Majid'. One of the organisers of *Free Majid Tavakoli*[33] believes that *Veiled Men* is basically far away from 'protest against the compulsory hijab': "[H]ere chador is not the symbol of compulsory hijab; it is just the symbol of women's wearing … this campaign is to free Majid" (Daroshafaei 2009). On the other hand, there were some people who thought it is the best time to fight the compulsory hijab. Shirin Ebadi, a human rights' activist who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, believes that men were defending women in this campaign. She continues: "I want to steal you [veiled men] from the Student Movement and proudly claim that you belong to the Iranian women's egalitarian movement" (DW 2009).

As William Morris observes: "[S]ocial movements often find themselves woven into unexpected new contexts that obscure their origins" (Flood & Grindon 2014, p.13). It cannot be denied that some people were seeing this campaign as a compliment to the Green Movement and a way to overthrow the Islamic Republic. A male blogger published a post in his blog, *Blondie*, entitled *Hey Dictator! We Want to*

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[33] Address: facebook.com/events/198929939029

Overthrow You by Girls' Hijab. After a short comment on women's rights he said: "[A]fter this, I will have a scarf with me in any demonstration and gathering against the regime; as a matter of respect to Iranian women" (Blondie 2009). Under this post we see this comment, which is irrelevant to Tavakoli's freedom. It illustrates a new meaning that the campaign took on:

> It is really sad when I see that Iranian police beat young girls wildly for their clothing, men are just observing and not doing anything, while they can save them easily, and the result: the men are subject to police brutality too. Let us make a commitment to ourselves: whenever we see they are attacking anybody for their clothing, man or woman, help those people and save them. (Blondie 2009)

Tavakoli's story, along with many others, proves that what basically shaped the Green Movement was more than just a demand for a new president. Pardis Mahvavi calls this movement an "organic" one, in which the protesters have not imitated other Western movements, and this underlines the role of pre-dated Iranian movements in both the Green Movement (2009) and the Islamic Revolution (1979) (Mahdavi 2013, p.24). She believes that:

> This movement was a call for a change of state apparatus. This movement was about communication to the global public that they are not happy, that they wanted a change in their political system and to reclaim their full rights citizens. (Mahdavi 2013, p.14)

Regarding the pre-dated movements, Mahdavi, for example, explains the role of the Sexual Revolution in the Green Movement. Based on her definition, the sexual revolution is "about changing discourse and views about sexuality" (Mahdavi 2013, p.17). This revolution has gradually affected the clothing Iranian youths were wearing or their sexual behaviour against the strict Islamic moral rules. Based on her interviews with some 180 participants in Iran she claims: "For many youth, their involvement in what they called 'sexual revolution' paved the way for their involvement in the Green Movement" (Mahdavi 2013, p.16). Being aware of such an ongoing revolution in Iran makes the way people respond to the pictures of Tavakoli in hijab even more meaningful.

Yet, like many people who were engaged with one or all of the four movements (the Green Movement, the Student Movement Women's Rights Movement, the Sexual Revolution), I too believe that publishing those pictures of Tavakoli by Fars

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News and Raja News was one of the best things that happened over the crisis period. This campaign shows the 'excess'; the fanatical desire of the campaigners for reaching their multiple goals. Apart from the government, everyone benefitted from it. I agree with the netizen, Naj, who says "the regime has really shot itself in the foot this time" (Blondie 2009).

Calling it *I Am Majid, We Are all Majid* or *Veiled Men*, this campaign was constructed and progressed, first by the Iranian users and then their international allies. We witnessed a range of user-generated content produced in this campaign (blog posts, social media posts, comments, artworks, and etc.). *I Am Majid* exemplifies the power of user-generated content in the age of 'spreadable media'. We can clearly see what Jenkins et al. recognise as the characteristic of such media: "grassroots intermediaries who advocate and evangelize," "diversified experiences" and "the flow of ideas" (Jenkins et al. 2013, p.299). Any user is able to change the direction and alter the content according to his or her intention and personal insight. Using the techniques and practices that were shared with citizen journalism and fandom, the campaigners did their best to serve their own goals, being either saving Majid or defending Iranian women.

Chapter Conclusions

User-generated content played a constructive role in both the formation and progression of the Green Movement. The materials produced within the process of protest, from the simplest appropriated artworks and blog posts to the more complex, catalysed innumerable human networks in a context of political suppression in both online and offline spaces. People inside and outside Iran made meaningful conversations through the interrupted, censored and highly controlled internet in Iran. Those conversations, along with the circulated materials, established an alternative and distributed medium for protesters and those who wanted to be in touch with the ongoing realities at the time. What people simply appropriated and published "are part of a media ecology that inspires hope for broader public discussion" (Milner 2013, p.2361). Majid Tavakoli was recently

released from prison. His case, as just one of the stories that emerged during the post-election crisis, demonstrates the potential of users' participation and the power of micro-media in serious political situations.

Chapter 4: Greens' Art Project: Forms and Functions

The Greens' Art website was established to provide an online repository of protest artworks produced in the pre- and post-election crisis period. The collected works include both born-digital works and works that were created in non-digital formats but were, subsequently, documented and distributed digitally. Digital copies of analogue works were important to the Green Movement's digital heritage because in many cases there was no access to the originals. The Greens' Art project drew upon some already extant collections (for example, on YouTube) and their associated documentation. The act of collection for this project decontextualised works from their place in these online resources, and then re-contextualised them on the website.

In this chapter, I briefly describe the nature of the material collected in the Greens' Art website. I explain how this project can be understood as a preservation initiative, an archive and an online exhibition. I explain how I collected and curated the materials, and then discuss the structure and formal aspects of the Greens' Art website. I explain different sections of this online repository and the rationale behind creating each section. Finally, I discuss ideas for the further development of this website.

The Green Movement's heritage largely consists of ephemeral works. By definition 'ephemera' is material "created for a specific, limited purpose, and generally designed to be discarded after use" (SAA n.d.). Common examples of such materials are tickets, brochures and receipts. In the Green Movement's case some examples of ephemeral materials are posters, graffiti (Fig. 4.1), or video clips that were created to deliver an invitation to a specific event or demonstration. They were

created in the moment in concert with the happenings; no one intended them to last.

Figure 4.1. On the left: the poster, *The Freedom's Dawn*, an invitation for the demonstration of the Student Day; on the right: a picture of the graffiti, *hope*

There were also other types of work, such as performances – which were ephemeral in their transience – and paintings or sculptures (Fig. 4.2) that were produced in non-digital formats. Although such works have the capacity to last in the non-digital world, when "digitality is an integral feature of modern society" (UNESCO, 2012), their absence in the digital world makes them ephemeral for netizens in practical terms.

Figure 4.2. On the left: the sculpture, *Neda, Freedom's Angel*, by Paula B. Slater – created in memory of Neda Agha-Soltan the most well-known martyr of the Green Movement. On the right: the painting, *Neda Was Killed on Tehran's street*, produced by an unknown artist

While the creators might not have intended their works to endure beyond the immediate time of the protests; it was clear that others saw value in them. Ordinary people, artists and citizen-journalists first started collecting materials to protect them from being lost and also re-circulated them. Small communities and news agencies also participated in archiving and republishing the materials. It is clear that people recognised the importance of maintaining traces of the Movement, despite the risks of doing so. They were not prepared for it to be 'disappeared' following the Government crackdown.

One of the factors that endangered the durability of the Green Movement's documents was the lack of governmental policies in preserving these materials. In fact, Iran's government has done its best to eliminate all evidence relating to the Movement in the last six years. In fact, since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 the Iranian authorities have constantly tried to manipulate and change the story of what happened in their favour. The Greens' story is just the latest chapter in this history. Although the National Library of Iran (NLAI n.d.) has an established online archives section that represents different sorts of politically sanctioned collections and stories on its website, such as the virtual exhibition of *The Islamic Republic's Glorious Victory* (NLAI n.d.), the failure to archive politically sensitive material confirms an intentional censorship rather than a lack of technological capability or knowledge.

The Greens' Art project built on, and amplified, the efforts of collectors and amateur archivists by integrating the available materials and information in a database, organising them, and providing visitors with an online exhibition. In the earliest plan, the goal of this project was to collect a limited number of artworks, categorise them and represent them in an online multimedia project. The scope was narrow but through the process of answering a set of critical questions the project began to change shape.

I had to reflect on my own participation in the Green Movement. I asked, what is my status relative to this project? Am I an observer, a participant, or both? What consequence does my status have on the project? What are the decisive factors in the collection/selection process? Will the selected artworks capture the aesthetic

aspect of the Green Movement properly? What might other researchers find significant for their scholarship about this project in the future? These questions changed the project's scope and priorities: the primary collection came to include most of the related works of the period. Instead of a few weeks, it took months to collect the initial materials for the website. Besides making a more comprehensive picture of the art's engagement with the Movement, the large quantity of works, along with the provided metadata, could also draw the visitors' attention to the enthusiasm and the feelings behind the works. Moreover, it could provide the visitors with undeniable evidence of the Movement's existence and its influence on different layers of society. After this change Greens' Art developed into a multifunctional project engaged with preservation, exhibition and archiving domains.

Greens' Art as a preservation initiative

"The web needs preservation initiatives to fight ephemerality" (Gomes et al. 2011, p.408). This need comes from the web's transient nature. Most content disappear as fast as they were born. Alexa Internet estimated that "web pages disappear on average after 75 days" (Day 2003, p.7). In another survey "it was observed that 80% of the pages are updated or disappear after one year" (Gomes et al. 2011, p.408). These figures are very worrying. This phenomenon endangers human history and has serious side effects on a range of everyday issues from the accountability of research to individuals' reminiscences.

The threats that endanger the Green Movement's digital heritage define the website's first function: preservation. Here, 'preservation' means "the act of keeping from harm, injury, decay, or destruction" (SAA n.d.). 'Protection' is implied here; protection against "an absence of legislation that fosters preservation, and international uncertainties about resources, responsibilities, and methods" (Webb 2003b, p.3).The other technical threat is 'data loss' which can be caused by human actions or environmental dangers that can make a digital entity partially or wholly unreadable (Kastellec 2012, p.63).

Besides all the different sorts of normal human acts which accelerated the process of data loss, the Iranian cyber police played a significant role in eliminating traces of the Green Movement. These attempts were in line with the general policies of the Iranian government against its opponents. On their website Iran's cyber police state:

> Responsibilities of cyber police are to secure and mitigation [sic] of risk for scientific, economic and social activities in information community, **protection of national and religious identity**, **prevention of illegal activities and prohibition of attack on values and norms of society.** (ICP n.d.)

The mandate of the cyber police's definition is vast and their reactions to cyber activities have been harsh. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the blogger, Satar Beheshti, one of their victims, was killed by torture during interrogation in 2012; he was arrested by this unit for criticising the government on his weblog (Dehghan 2012). After the cyber police started monitoring activists many blog and website owners inside and outside Iran deleted their earlier posts due to both implicit and explicit pressure. Not only were people told to take down contents, some people acted on their own volition to delete things to protect themselves. Such acts of self-censorship are examples of 'purposeful alteration' made by humans that caused data loss. From the very beginning of this research, large numbers of materials from the pre- and post-election crisis period, including relevant artworks, have likely been irretrievably lost. The Greens' Art project ensured that the considerable number of remaining ephemeral materials will not disappear.

Greens' Art as an Archive

The Greens' Art project is an online archive that uses a combination of archiving strategies. There are many different strategies for acquiring archival materials. These differences are driven from the diversity of nature and form of 'born-digital' or digitised materials and, of course, different archival projects' missions. A media arts approach, a game preservation approach and a web archiving approach are some of the most significant strategies when it comes to digital archiving.

Michael Day, a researcher at Bath University, has identified three approaches to the collection of websites: deposit approach, selective capture and automatic harvesting (Day 2003, pp.5–6). In the automatic harvesting approach, web crawler programs are used to follow links and download content according to particular collection rules (e.g*. The Internet Archive* and *Iran Web Archive Project* (Shadanpour 2009)). The second strategy is the selective capture approach, which is based on the selection of individual websites for inclusion in an archive (e.g. the National Library of Australia), and the third strategy is the Deposit Approach, which is based on site owners or administrators depositing a copy or snapshot of their site in a repository (e.g. some online publications on the German National Library's website)

The librarian and IT professional, Mike Kastellec, offers slightly different models for archiving digital objects. Discussing the limits that endangered digital preservation he identifies four models for selecting digital objects, based on the degree of human involvement in the process (Kastellec 2012):

Selective model	The librarians individually identify digital objects worthy of digital preservation.
Whole domain model	Digital objects are identified by automated harvesting.
Collaborative model (Can be used in the first two models)	Archival institutions negotiate agreements with publishers to deposit content.
Thematic model (Can be used in the first two models)	Relatively narrow sets of digital objects are defined by event, topic, or community.

Rhizome ArtBase is a good example of a selective/collaborative media art archive that "encompasses a vast range of projects by artists all over the world that employ materials such as software, code, websites, moving images, games and browsers to aesthetic and critical ends" (Rhizome 2011). At present, more than 3000 works are

documented and exhibited in this project's website[34]. These artworks have been collected in three ways: artists' submissions, annual commissions and by special invitation. The acquired works were appraised, documented, preserved and curated by a board of trustees "to provide free, open, and permanent access to a living and historic collection of seminal new media art objects." To keep the artists' ideas alive this project works "directly with them to select the best means of representing their work in a sustainable format"(Rhizome 2011). A similar approach is taken by the editorial board of the *Archive of Digital Art (ADA).* They aimed to document the complex, ephemeral and context dependent nature of today's digital artworks. As they mentioned on their website[35] "the ADA represents the scientific selection of several hundred international artists of approximately 5000 evaluated artists" (*ADA* 1999). Like the *ArtBase*, artists can post their materials on *ADA*'s website. *ADA*'s criteria for selecting the artworks are "artistic inventions like innovative interfaces, displays or software." This project provides its visitors with videos, technical information, graphics and relevant links about the artworks.

Video and computer games are also culturally and aesthetically important digital heritage objects; however, their complex nature makes archiving and preservation more complicated. As archival materials, games have several properties that should be captured by an archivist, including codes, interfaces, documentation, history, etc. An example that can be mentioned here is the *Play It Again* project's *Popular Memory Archive (PMA)*[36]; "a game history and preservation project focused on locally-written digital games in 1980s Australia and New Zealand" (Stuckey et al. 2013, p.1). The PMA is an exhibition of documentation about local games. The scope of selection is limited to 50 games out of more than 900 identified. Some of the criteria for being featured are: "Important game designers; formal innovation/pushing technical limits; popular or nationally significant platforms; overall representation and balance; and consideration of the quality of the games" (Stuckey et al. 2013, p.2). Along with contextualising the games through retrieving their history and collecting gamers' memories and interactions, the PMA aimed to

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[34] rhizome.org/artbase
[35] www.digitalartarchive.at
[36] PMA is generated by Play it Again team (playitagainproject.org)

make the archived items accessible for visitors by translating the source code and making the games playable in browsers.

"What should be kept?" was the key question when it came to choosing the archiving approach. This was important because "every choice to preserve is at the expense of something else" (Webb 2003a, p.73). I agree with Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon that a part of what I saved through the collection process "might seem to fail in comparative judgments of aesthetic quality. But a failure to pass can be a form of disobedience in its own right, not least in questioning the narrow grounds of quality … They may be simple in means, but they are rich in ends" (Flood & Grindon 2014, p.12). I, too, believe that "history is inevitably a matter of selective inclusion." Excluding such works could manipulate this project's agenda – history telling- in undesirable ways.

The criteria informing my selection of works, then, were their relationship to the Green Movement and their date of production, between 2009 and 2011. An ideal total archive was not achievable for many reasons, including technology, access, laws and financial constraints (Kastellec 2012, p.65). Being aware of this fact, I used a combination of whole domain (encyclopaedia mode) and collaborative models to move towards a comprehensive archive rather than a total one. By applying this strategy Greens' Art tries to archive and document most of the relevant artworks. The only difference with normal whole domain approaches was that in this project none of the processes was automated. Every single work was found, catalogued and contextualised by human actors.

Greens' Art as an online exhibition

Greens' Art also functions as an online exhibition of the archived materials. The website is a flexible platform that can be added to or manipulated based on the project's needs in future. Jennifer Mundy, a modern art specialist and Jane Burton, a creative director, describe two different types of online exhibitions: *Capturing the Gallery* and *Rich Media Catalogue*.

The *Rich Media Catalogue* builds "upon early expressions of online exhibitions, this approach still foregrounds images of the artworks in a two-dimensional design scheme, akin to a printed catalogue, but increasingly it offers rich media assets to support the images" (Mundy & Burton 2013, p.2). In terms of design it is simple. Their 2D interface is based on hyperlink attributes. It usually offers a collection of artworks' categorised by 'thumbnails' that can be enlarged by users' clicks, which also provide the visitor with a range of textual, visual or audio descriptions. Two typical examples of *Rich media Catalogue* they describe are the *Smithsonian American Art Museum's* online exhibitions[37] and the *Art Collect Online (ACO)* [38]. Other similar websites that I reviewed as prototypes are *Arts Access Australia*[39], *Encyclopaedia of Australian Science*[40], *National Cinema* and *Television Database*[41] and *Daniel Langlois Foundation's*[42]; all of them have used the same technical details to exhibit their valuable contents.

Mundy and Burton describe *Capturing the Gallery* as an "approach [that] involves using the latest 360-degree stills or video technology to produce an interactive online replica of the gallery exhibition." This type of online exhibition is increasingly being used by different museums. Its technical capabilities make it possible for the user to virtually visit the galleries and to get close to the material. The prototypes of this type are the National Gallery's virtual tour in the UK[43] or Louvre Museum's online tours[44]. It seems that researchers are still trying to make the visitors' experience more realistic. HTML5 and all the recent technologies opened new windows to projects like the Sensory Chrome Experiment, which "uses gesture-based interaction instead of a keyboard or mouse, combining two inputs (sound and camera) to interpret users' movements."

Even though Greens' Art is an online-only exhibition, *Capturing the Gallery* was an option. I decided against it because financially, technically and in terms of time

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[37] www.americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online

[38] www.artcollectonline.com.au
[39] www.artsaccessaustralia.org
[40] www.eoas.info
[41] www.bonzadb.com.au
[42] www.fondation-langlois.org
[43] www.nationalgallery.org.uk/visiting/virtualtour
[44] www.louvre.fr/en/visites-en-ligne

limits the *Rich Media Catalogue* was a more feasible approach. It had all the features this project needed to reach the objectives and could represent the archived artworks in an integrated and meaningful fashion. Moreover, my previous experience as a web designer engaged with these sorts of websites gave me the skills to execute the idea. The programmer and I started the website's production in December 2012 and the first version was ready in April 2013. In this website PHP, Java Script and CSS were used. The colour green was chosen as a thematic colour as it is still a strong metaphor for the Movement.

Methodology

To preserve the largest possible collection of works the Greens' Art archive was begun with the whole domain approach. I targeted all the possible websites to acquire any artwork related to the Green Movement. It should be mentioned here that the primary resources were limited to the available sites on the internet to avoid making any security problems for anyone, especially, if he/she was living in Iran. I started with major resources such as Jaras[45] and Kalemeh,[46] two news media affiliated with the Movement and then went to major news agencies' websites, such as BBC Persian[47], Radio Farda[48] and Voice of America[49] (Persian Service). Then I approached the minor collections of artworks that were established by some protesters, including the *Green Lyrics*[50] or *Videoblog of the Green Movement*[51] whose curator(s) were collecting many of the video clips that were produced during the crisis period. And then, it was the time for personal blogs and websites and social media such as YouTube and Facebook to be scanned.

After the quantity and variety of the main collection of works created to support the Movement reached a desirable level, I started to work on a new idea that emerged during the collection process – inclusion of a section for the artworks that

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[45] www.rahesabz.net
[46] www.kaleme.com
[47] www.bbc.co.uk/persian
[48] www.radiofarda.com
[49] ir.voanews.com
[50] tranehayesabz.blogspot.com.au
[51] greenrevolutioniran.blogspot.com.au

were created against the Movement. Having such a collection of works created by pro-government artists would give another dimension and add more depth to the collection/archive. Along with protecting such works from being lost it could provide the visitor with a comparative reading and fuller context for considering the politics of contemporary Iran. I could see it as a more 'democratic' approach to the engagement of art and the Green Movement, as both pro- and anti-Movement actors have their thoughts represented on the project's website.

The collection has never been static. It was always being added to using the collaborative model (deposit approach). After I launched the website I received new material and information from visitors to the Greens' Art website. Some of them who contacted me were the artists themselves and some of them were individuals who personally collected some relevant materials.

Curation

The materials I gathered and the materials that were contributed by others all had to be checked for accuracy; and all had to be organised. I applied the selective capture approach (selective model) in order to make sure that the collected artworks met the criteria. I evaluated the collected artworks backed by my lived experience and research to ensure that all of the information associated with them were correct. An artist's name or event incorrectly recorded could risk the reliability of the archive.

I used formal and generic categories to organise the materials, prevent overlaps, and enable more precise searches and easier navigation for visitors. Having said that, 'tagging' was an option for categorising the materials. In that case, visitors could search for the materials using keywords that were assigned to each item. I decided against this as the outcome would not be that clear. I identified 24 categories of artworks in my collection and organized the items into categories that reflected genre and form: documentary video, video clip, animation, short movie, long movie, digital painting, painting, graffiti, poster and illustration, website

banner, cartoon, general drawing, lyric, poem, novel, short story, political humour, slogan, music, photo, sculpture, performing art, costumes and accessories.

In addition to genre and form, chronology was another key organizing principle applied to the collection. By creating the Green Movement's Timeline (Calendar) I wanted to list and demonstrate the artworks relating to specific dates or events. After several iterations I reached the current limited list of events. After the final list was ready I generated some codes based on the Persian Calendar to be used in the database. For example, I assigned 880418 to 1388/04/18 which is the equivalent of July 9, 2009. After the codes were generated I put the relevant code in front of any artwork that was related to an event in my list. These codes enabled me to build the final timeline. In this section of the website, users can now choose a date from those listed, go to the allocated page, read the description provided and browse different sorts of artworks related to the chosen event. This section offers temporal contextualisation and will help future researchers and ordinary visitors to puzzle out the background stories.

Structure/Universal Navigation and User Experience

As noted above, the Greens' Art website most closely aligns with a 'rich media catalogue' model: a 2D hypertextual environment with audiovisual assets. On the first page (Fig. 4.3) the visitor finds an introduction about the project that briefly explains the background and the aims. The website is bilingual. Except for the textual artworks originally in Farsi (e.g. poems, short stories) all the other information is available in both English and Persian (Farsi). By clicking on the flags located under the menu bar the user can choose between these two languages at any time; the current page will be translated to the other language without diverting the user to the first page of an English version of the website. Also, along with a slideshow of posters and illustrations, the visitor encounters various random shortcuts – generated by the software – to different sections of the website.

Figure 4.3. Home page of the Greens' Art website

The website consists of five main sections: Artworks, Calendar, Anti-Movement, Artists and Resources. In the Artworks' page the user is provided with a short description of the artworks presented. There is a drop down menu in which the user can look for specific works by choosing between different categories, artists, origins and related events. A list of filtered works is placed under the drop down menu. Clicking on the body of each row opens a window in which the user can preview the work and see the related information, such as, the title, the creator's name, source, and access date of that specific work. He/she also can share the work on Facebook and Twitter by clicking on the buttons provided. If the user clicks on the item's title he/she will be diverted to that item's page. There, in addition to the information mentioned, there is a list of related artworks offered by the website (Fig. 4.4).
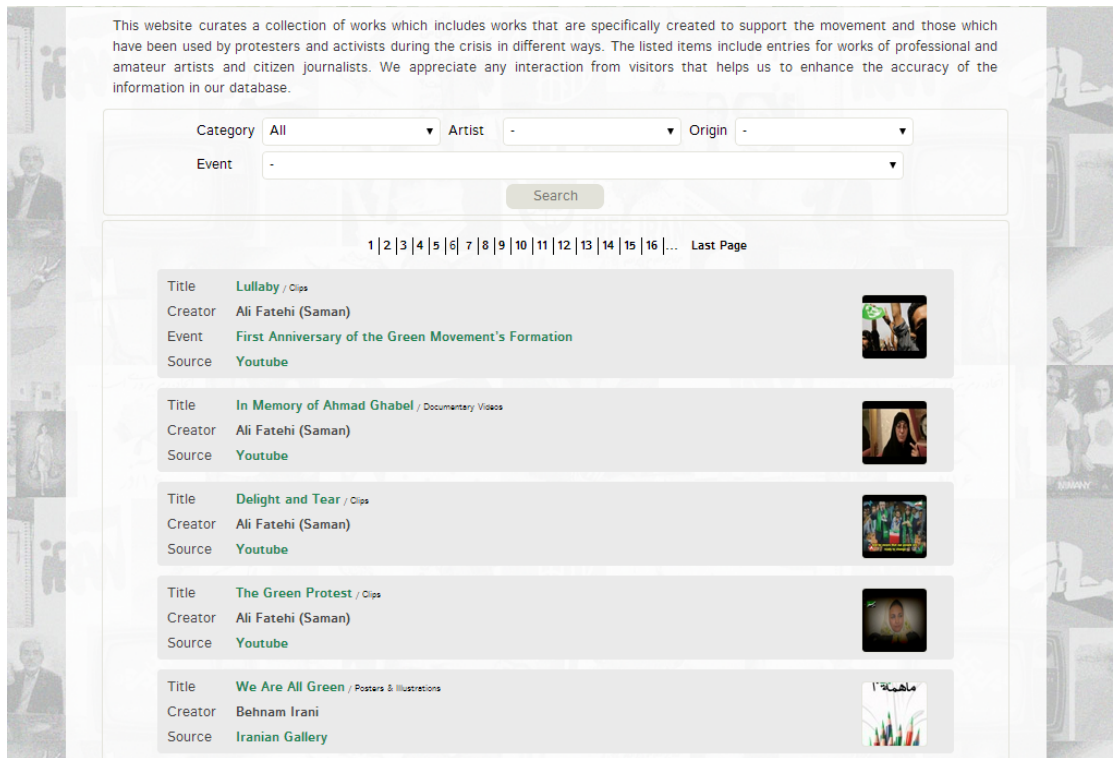
Figure 4.4. The Artworks' section on the Greens' Art website

The Calendar section allows the user to see a list of important events from 2009 to 2011 (e.g. *The Protest around Ghoba Mosque in Tehran*). If he/she clicks on one of them the specified page for that event opens. There, a short description along with its source is shown. In the section below a list of related artworks are provided (Fig. 4.5).
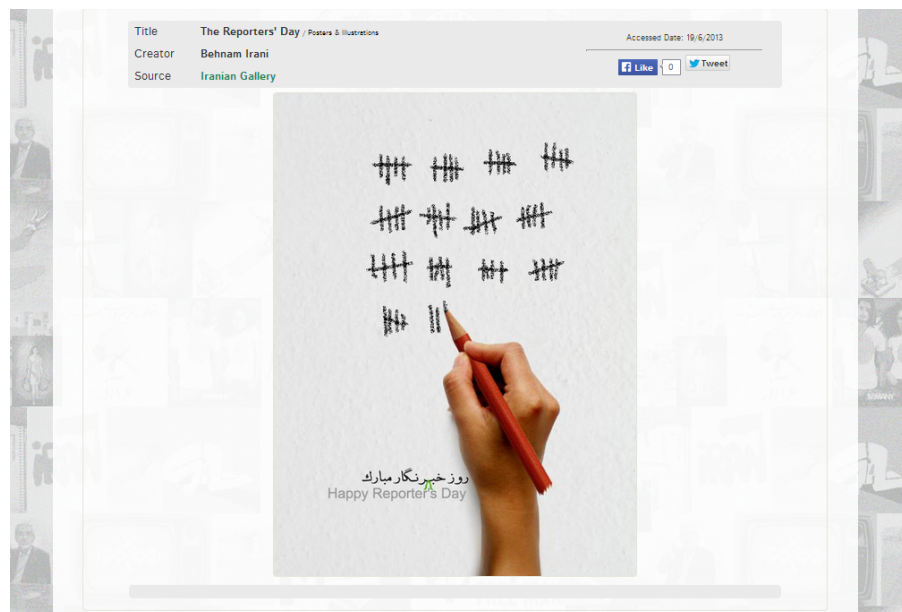

Figure 4.5. Published for the Journalist' Day, this graphic design criticises the imprisonment of reporters

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Besides the Artworks' section that includes all the professional and amateur artworks, the Artists' section presents artworks that were created only by professional artists during the pre- and post-election period. This section presents a list of famous artists. By clicking on each artist's name or picture the user finds his/her brief biography along with a list of related works (Fig. 4.6).
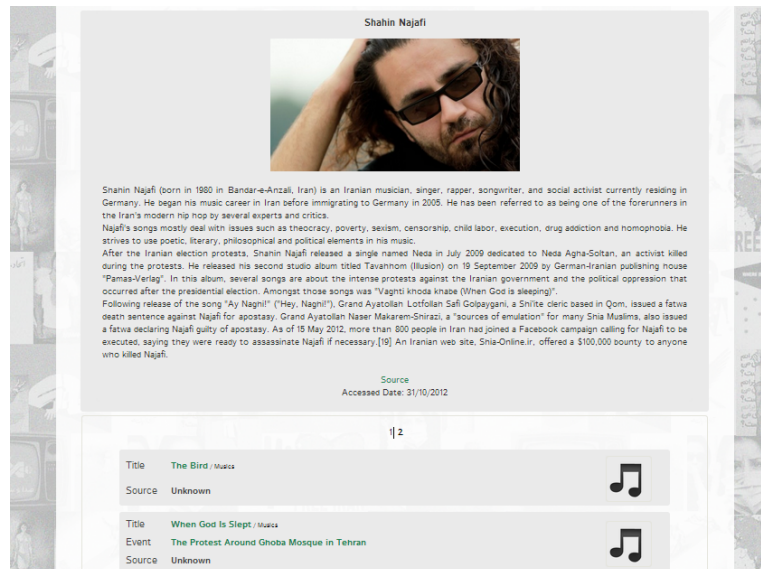

Figure 4.6. The singer, Shahin Najafi's page on the Greens' Art website

The References section provides links to the body of research that inform this thesis. The About Us page introduces the Greens' Art project and makes clear its terms and conditions (e.g. the website is non-commercial and is not associated with any government, political party, or lobbyist organisation). The website also contains a Testimonies part which reflects the different sorts of reactions I received from the project's visitors in textual format.

The Green Movement can be taken as an open public conversation. Understood in this way, the artworks on the Greens' Art website represent a collection of user-generated content produced and distributed by protesters from different schools of thought and from various social and economic classes. There are a variety of ideas embedded in these works. To enrich the artefacts, the contribution or testimony of the creators and visitors plays a constructive role in the history telling process. In the current version of the Greens' Art website contributors can interact by sending

a message[52] or an email to the website. More than anything, these works are the evidence of their creator's and consumer's lived experience. The associated ideas, comments and memories can bring a 'soul', more perspectives and dimensions to these raw materials. This collaboration helps to correct probable errors and both the archival and exhibition aspects of the project.

I was, and am, aware that the project is politically of a high-risk. A few days after its launch, the site was blocked by the Iranian authorities. I did not, and do not, want to cause any problems for the website's users inside Iran. I cannot technically guarantee the security of visitors. As a result, the interaction options are intentionally limited to protect the identity of contributors. The website's email address is intentionally absent from the site to minimize the possibility of getting hacked by Iranian government's agents. Also, to improve the privacy and security we put reCAPTCHA software on this page (Fig. 4.7).

Figure.4.7. Contact form on the Greens' Art website

The system works well if users just send textual messages. But, if someone wants to send artwork (or any type of file) they must first send a message asking for the website's email address. To establish a 'quasi peer review by community' system I have invited the visitors to collaborate by putting a sentence on the Artworks page:

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[52] www.greens-art.net/contact?lang=en

"[W]e appreciate any interaction from visitors that helps us to enhance the accuracy of the information in our database."

By the time the website launched on 15 May 2013, about 1500 works (including 100 anti-movement works) were collected, catalogued and categorised. After the website became public, I sent a press release to more than 30 Iranian and non-Iranian media agencies. What surprised me after that was the heartening messages from visitors and their offers to include their own materials (produced or collected by them) in the Greens' Art database; for example, Ali's message said:

> I am not an artist at all; however, after Sane Jaale and Mohamad Mokhtari were killed I designed simple illustrations by my computer and shared them with my Facebook friends. I did it again after Ezatollah Sahabi passed away and her daughter was killed. If you give me your email address I will send them to you. Use them if you like.

Mazdak wrote:

> This great resource made me so happy. I hope you do not give up and complete it. It would be great if I could help. I can give you some of my writings. You can use them if you want. I was in solidarity confinement for a while in 2009 and then was sent to political ward and so on … I wrote some stories and notes during that time which were published here and there …

I received these types of emails occasionally for several months. I gradually contacted all of the people; their correspondence added more than 1000 works of different categories to the Greens' Art primary database. Another advantage was that through their comments people helped me to correct the information on the website. For example, Yaser claimed: "the lyric *Mate*[53] is not Seyed Mehdi Mousavi's work. It's Mehdi Mousavi's." He was right. I investigated and found that there are two poets with similar names and so I edited the information on the website. Other similar cases occurred. A researcher from Norway conducting research on Iranian Green Posters (irangreenposters.org) contacted me. Our conversation led to an agreement that brought a very rich collection of posters and illustrations into the archive. I, also, received tens of impressive works by political prisoners, produced from inside Iran's prisons (Fig. 4.8). The persons who sent them were previously political prisoners themselves; one of them escaped to Europe and another one is still living in Iran. These contacts opened a new window to this

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[53] www.greens-art.net/artwork/569/?lang=en

project's future. This shows us the power of art as a means of expression even under a totally controlled environment like prison.
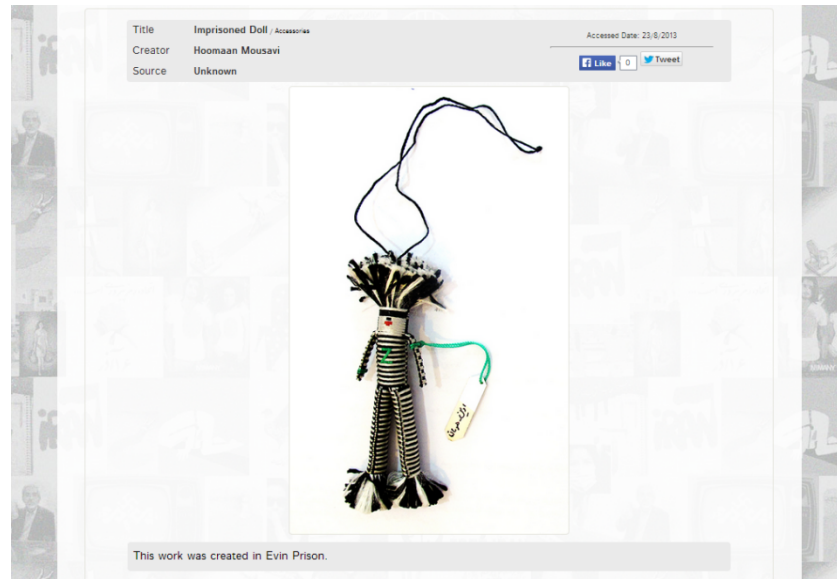

Figure4.8. Picture of a doll on the Green's Art website produced in Evin Prison by a political prisoner

Further Developments

The Greens' Art website is a prototype. The current version has the minimum requirements for the project. In this online exhibition I can technically archive, exhibit and curate the relevant works. This makes it possible to enrich and edit the information provided and enhance the database on the website over time. The interface is also easy to use and makes it possible for the visitor to browse these thousands of works without getting confused.

One of the most important areas for further development is to have more options for interactivity on the website. I want to develop multiple ways to establish connections with visitors, to keep them more connected and help them to reflect on and share what they see on the website. Online forums and a place to comment on each single work with the ability to technically build conversations on the website are the first phases that should be considered. The other plan is to add more social media tools to the website to enable users to share the material on their personal pages through different channels. These acts will help the project to reach what my interviewee Reza pointed out:

> Like similar projects, if this exhibition gains more audience and keep its relationship with them it can play a significant role in reminding people - current and future generations- of one of the most important periods of Iran's history.

I believe this archive can be more comprehensive. Naturally, this project will continue to grow, having been put on the web it will attract contributions. So, there will be a need for a continuing curation of new materials.

The other part that should be expanded is the Artists section; I would like to have more profiles of the producers on the website and gradually collect their comments and reflections on the project. This will help to contextualise the material and make it more understandable.

Chapter Conclusions

The positive responses that I have already received were encouraging. Some of the feedback included the following remarks. Hana, one of my interviewees stated: "Each work in this collection is an important document in history." Reza believed that: "If you leave the history with people, they will forget it very soon. This project can help them to learn from their previous experiences." Elaheh has the same idea as Reza: "[T]this website records an important part of Iran's history. It provides the future generations with a valuable treasure." She added: "[A]lso, it gives hope to the artists who were engaged with the protests"; she believed that such exhibitions show that they were not forgotten. Also, "it keeps the hope of change and shows a different profile of Iran to the world." Ali saw the Greens' Art as a work of art itself; however, he believed that its role being "a resource" is more significant: "I believe in the unexpected/sudden effects of art on people; however, in this case the Iranians outside the country have a better chance to get engaged with the materials." He was referring to the controlled and regulated access of people to the internet in Iran. Nader went further and believed that such projects can even have some effect on socio-political situation of the country.

In an era in which digital technologies have become the most essential means of creation and expression, preserving and representing digital heritage is critically

important for the current and future generations. Greens' Art, with its dual archival and exhibition aspects is doing this for the Green Movement of Iran. This project, first, documents the digitally distributed works and, secondly, documents history through the materials. The collection works as a place to keep the artefacts safe and their associated memories alive. The idea behind this project mostly aligns with the fact that "our memories are mediated by our media, forming a dynamic relationship that forms our personal and collective identities" (Stuckey et al. 2013, p.3). This website also provides future researchers of art, politics and media with a contextualised multimedia resource about a significant and contemporary case study.

Conclusions

The Greens' Art project has archived, preserved and exhibited the ephemeral works generated and circulated in support, or against, the Green Movement of Iran with the aim of sustaining the Movement or, at least, an historic record of it. This exegesis has explored both the nature of that process and its significance as a political act. This unique movement has relevance for a range of disciplines, such as art, media and politics. The way the protesters and the government became engaged with digital media and art has opened new horizons for researchers who are interested in the mechanisms of social and political movements in the age of digital re/production.

Through the different chapters of this exegesis I used the available literature relevant to the subject of this study and in context with the materials I borrowed from the Greens' Art website to get closer to the goal of this project: to make a clearer understanding of the significance of aesthetics in the Green Movement. In this regard, I investigated two main areas that were essentially engaged with the topic: art and digital media. In each of these two domains the study faced different and, most of the time, opposing ideas from the theorists and commentators across the fields. While some of them have seen the role of art or digital media in the Green Movement as constructive, there have always been other figures with totally different opinions. And, of course a range of cautious and more moderate ideas could be found within the debates.

The Green Movement case study moves the debate on art and politics beyond the famous dyad of the "aestheticisation of politics" and the "politicisation of art" (Benjamin 2008, p.42) as the representatives of fascist and leftist readings of art's role in political situations. Art as was used by the Green Movement stands faraway from Marinetti's fascist reading which defines art as "violence, cruelty and

injustice"; an art that "glorify war" (Marinetti 1973). The Green's Art is also different from Benjamin's Marxist reading of art and its potential in "progressive propaganda" (Robinson 2013, p.4). In this exegesis it was explained that how protesters used artworks as news media and sources of information, which enabled the protesters to use them for advocacy purposes. The works of the period expressed their creators and publishers' feelings and diverse thoughts. The artworks also motivated protesters to contribute to demonstrations and helped them maintain the spirit of the movement during the crisis period through engaging them, both logically and emotionally, with what was happening. Besides these sorts of works that were created to "empower, unify, and stabilize the powerless, fledgling movement" the Green Movement has had art activists who created works to "challenge and destabilize the powerful social order" (Shank 2005, pp.539–540). In the hands of pro-government artists, including amateurs or professionals, art was used more to react against the Movement through criticising, humiliating or manipulating [the] 'goings on' during the crisis period. More than protesters, their creators' target seemed to be the supporters of the government with the aim of uniting them and keeping them motivated against the Greens.

The Islamic Republic misunderstood the power of digital media in the very early stages of the protests in 2009. This miscalculation gave people the opportunity to establish or reuse their informal networks to organise the mass protests in the first weeks of the unrest (e.g. Widespread Rally of the Greens from Revolution Square to Freedom Square). Such mass protests formed the basis of the Green Movement. The type of online activism that the Greens were mostly engaged with resembles the techniques or models of older forms of activism (e.g. call for rally, boycotts or support). Although the internet-enabled technologies changed the scale of the activism at the time, by "supersizing" (Earl & Kimport 2011, p.24) the activism, digital tools enabled the protestors to reach greater audiences, increase the speed of information circulation and reduce the costs (e.g. printing, posting) that could be serious barriers in non-digital formats of activism.

As the intelligence forces of the government learned how to manage and monitor protesters' online activities, the Greens gradually lost their advantage in cyberspace. It was the government's initial lag in entering the online battlefield that

misled some commentators (e.g. Kristof, Sullivan) who thought online activism could drive a revolution or regime change in Iran. Digital media played multiple roles in the Green Movement, and explanations such as the 'Twitter Revolution' are over-simplistic and inadequate to describe its multiple dimensions.

Six years after the protests arose, it is clear that what happened, in practice, was different from the idealistic thoughts of the more optimist commentators. Digital media and art were not able to make a revolution or to give life to people's stolen votes on their own, and within, the unique mechanism of politics in Iran; however, both of these phenomena have played very significant roles in the hands of protesters/artists/activists. Besides all the informative roles, digital media helped the Green Movement to form and develop. Digital tools enabled amateur and professional artists to become more efficient as the recorders of history, the interpreters of the 'goings on' and the maintainers of the protesters' spirits. As digital "activist objects" the circulated works of this period of time "make change as part of ecologies composed also of other objects, music, performing bodies, technology, laws, organizations and affects" (Flood & Grindon 2014, p.15). The circulation of the artworks through digital media tools has also been temporarily enabling like-minded people to gather in cyberspace and start conversations about current social and political subjects as well as expressing themselves. As well as adding to the meaning contained in artworks, these gatherings that move from one artwork to another have given an immediate social and political role to art.

The Iranian authorities finally managed the online space with heavy monitoring and harsh punishments for those who were arrested due to their online activities; however, internet-enabled media continued to play a significant role in spreading information and connecting people to each other. In fact, none of the controlling strategies and filtering systems applied by the government has been able to stop people from sending and receiving politically, or socially, sensitive materials including user-generated content. Today, six years after the Presidential election of 2009, people still bypass the filtering system to produce and share artworks relevant to the Green Movement. Different occasions or events can re-start the trend of the production and circulation of such materials: Persian New year, birthdays of Green prisoners, hunger strikes of prisoners, or anniversaries of the

Green Movement's crucial dates (e.g. death of Neda Agha-Soltan, the demonstration of 15 June 2009). The reaction of activists to such events and people's support in circulating the materials brings this idea to mind; that even if the Green Movement is dead, it was still an unsolved problem, an ongoing issue in Iran's contemporary history.

Thousands of artworks created by professional and amateur artists were part of the content circulated through digital media. At the time, they played their roles as the conveyers of information, stories and awareness for the Movement. These works, original or appropriated, demonstrate a shared historical, social and political experience in Iran. They accumulated feelings ready to be used when appropriate. In this specific period of time art had an essential dependency on digital media to be effective. The way the circulated artworks expanded the public discourse around what had happened can be taken as a part of the role digital media played in the progression of the Green Movement.

The collection of artworks catalogued in the Greens' Art website preserves the majority of the Movement's artistic output. This archive tells the stories of the pre- and post-election period through people's artworks and the realities, hopes, pains and feelings captured in them. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are still more functions and services to be implemented in this developing online project. The current version of the Greens' Art website extends an invitation for a larger conversation around the role of art and digital media in today's politics.

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