Is the Internet Good or Bad?
Yes.

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The War of the Anectodes

- Arab Spring or «Patients Like Me»
- Neonazis and Anti-vaccination Groups
- War of examples
Is the Internet Good or Bad

- Wrong question
- Answer is «Yes»
- The real question is: how?
Need to distinguish

• Affordances of the medium
• The channels of impact
• The social mechanisms through which they operate
Affordances -
laws of physics versus laws of bits

- Spatial (physics: bounded)
- Temporal (physics: ephemeral)
- Computational (physics: cognitive processes)
Spatial

• Connectivity
  ▫ Horizontal and otherwise
• Assembly
  ▫ New organizational forms (wiki, email list, Facebook group)
Temporal

- Persistence
- Multiplex temporality
  - time-shifting (asynchronous)
  - immediate (skype)
  - mixed (Twitter, IM)
Computational

- Random Access
- Search
- Trends
- News Feed
- Pagerank
Channels

• Social. (Hint: We are not cats)
• Informational
• Computational and Algorithmic
Social Mechanisms

- Homophily/Clumping
- Polarization/Distancing
- Bridging and Remixing
- Visibility/Optics
- Pluralistic Ignorance (Public is a Meta-Concept)
- Attention Pathways
- Remixing the Public/Private spheres
- Collective Action
Homophily

- Birds of a feather flock together
- In offline world, happens through agency and structure
  - Clubs, interest groups
  - Neighborhoods and universities
- Online:
  - Less place-bound
  - Different balance between achieved (rather than ascribed) dimensions
    - Rather than class or neighborhood, your interests
Homophily and Counterpublics

• Good or Bad?
  ▫ Arab Spring
  ▫ Anti-Vaccination
Polarization and Distancing

• In-group / out-group is basic human social feature
• Groups drift *away* from the middle
Polarization. Good or Bad?

- Isolating open racism
- Post-Arab Spring Egypt, US politics
Bridging and Remixing

- Hub People, translators, cosmopolitans
- Opportunities are exponential
Bridging? Good or Bad?

- «We Love Iranians»
- No more dog whistling – someone will tell.
Visibility and Optics

- Things lost to time and space now persist
- Things that always were but rarely seen
Is It Always Better to See?

- Anti-Bullying
- Yazidi bombings
Pluralistic Ignorance

- Public is a meta-concept
- It’s not what I know, but what I know others know
Preference revelation leads to..?

- Revolution
- #unbonjuit
Attention Pathways

- Attention is at the heard of politics and much else
- Attention and mass media conflated because they were intertwined.
- Novel pathways
Non-Mass Media
Production of Attention

- Social media «micro-celebrity» activists
- Star Wars kid
- #Kony2012
Remixing the Public and the Private

- Facebook and context collapse
- «Cute Cat Theory»
- Farrell: «Labile Communication»
- Gender implications
- Gate-keeping and gate-crashing
Public-Private Remixing

- Terminally ill children
- The «overshare»
- New counter-publics
Collective Action

• How do humans ever act together?
  ▫ Coordination
  ▫ Information
  ▫ Social pressure
  ▫ Free-rider
Changing Face of Collective Action

- Arab Spring
- Anti-Vaccination
Is the Internet Good or Bad?

• Yes
• Thank you!

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