

Around Town

Net cracker

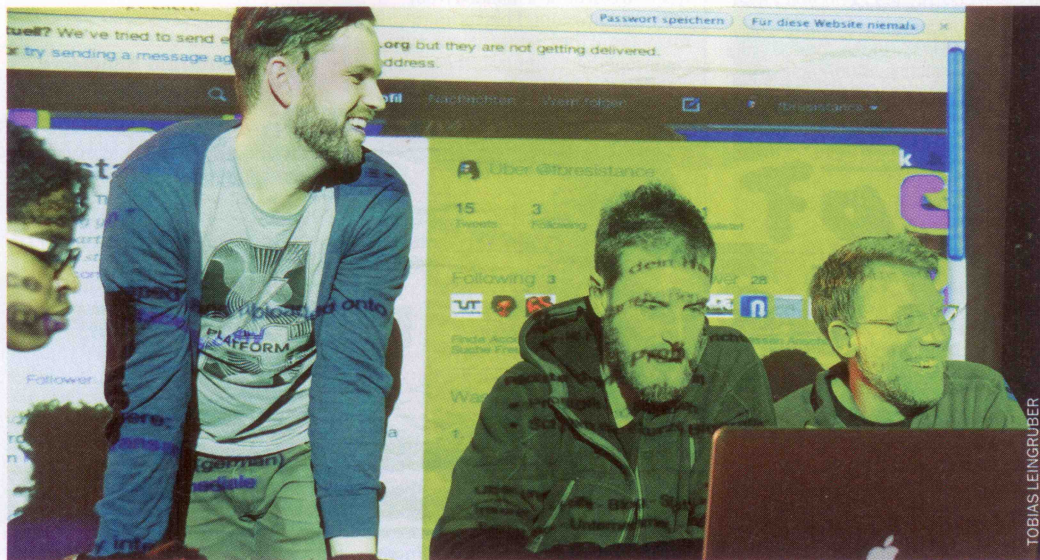
Is Facebook taking over our lives? And if it is, so what? In email interviews with new media researcher and user control advocate Marc Stumpel who is conducting a Facebook Resistance workshop this fortnight, and artist and communication designer Tobias Leingruber, the originator of the FB Resistance idea, **Akhila Seetharaman** attempts to answer these questions.

There's a lot said about the role of social media in fuelling political revolutions. What do you make of the role of Facebook, for instance, in the recent uprisings in the Arab world?

Marc Stumpel Clearly, social media has been utilised as instruments by citizens in the Middle East to organise and coordinate democratic protests. They have also proven to be important sources for real-time reporting and documenting political events. The use of networked communication in political protests, however, is nothing new. In my view, it's wrong to assume there is a causal relationship between social media and "political revolutions". You need "the people" to instigate a revolution; they will unquestionably use any media at hand.

My interest lies more with researching and exposing the political dimension of social media, rather than questioning its relationship with the politics that we are used to talking and writing about. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are sites of governance themselves, as the user activities, conditions and data distribution are maintained by a particular set of rules and constraints, embedded in the software.

How do social media sites control people, while at the



Social sturdy Members of the Resistance (seen here at a seminar) admit that Facebook has already made inroads into our lives

same time giving them more outlets for self expression and communication?

MS Proprietary social networking software like Facebook have many constraints, which means that users have to abide by the laws and strict limits as defined by the software. Where is our 'freedom'? For example, why not let the users change their background colour or 'dislike' something?

There have been many changes to Facebook that have met with widespread opposition and outrage. How does one make sense of these instances?

MS Facebook's PR communication regarding its immediate software changes has been very deceptive. They've repeatedly used a particular vocabulary to create images of Facebook 'apologising' for or 'justifying' rigid changes. They say, 'Look! We 'simplified' privacy controls, because we care about your privacy,' while making them more complex instead.

Can you tell us a few things that Facebook users should know but don't, about the way Facebook uses their stuff?

Tobias Leingruber Realise the nature of the company. Google is

not a search engine. Google is an advertising network. Facebook is not a social network – it's an advertising network. We are the product, 'the sheeple'. We get to be in a herd, but we pay with our most private data. They shave our wool.

MS Facebook is not transparent about its Web user-tracking activities. Via cookies it saves every website you visit outside of Facebook that has any FB social plugin implemented. We don't exactly know what FB does with this tracking data.

What is the Facebook Resistance?

MS Our attempt is to resist from within the system by slowly undermining and questioning it. This means we're not leaving it and building a new one. We're accepting the fact that Facebook has already 'won' for now, and we're trying to make the best out of it by bending its rules.

Critical talk about social media landscape often borrows from the lexicon of war – with online suicide, tactical media, resistance, etc. How much of a warzone is it?

TL Nice observation! Actually 'cyberwar' has become very real this year, as US and Israeli

militants created a worm that successfully attacked and physically destroyed parts of the Iranian nuclear research programme.

But more specifically on social media I think those extreme terms are very helpful to get people's attention. We're overwhelmed by information, so getting people's attention is an art form itself.

MS We are not at 'war' with Facebook; we are at "software", fighting for internet freedom and the adoption of open standards.

What is the potential of resistance to Facebook? What can be achieved?

TL In theory we could undermine and replace their entire system. For example, the chat – to get rid of the tracking and censorship, the system behind Facebook's chat interface could be replaced with something else, such as the Jabber protocol through an independent server.

MS Expanding your freedom on Facebook by learning how to impose new rules and features onto the system through internet browser processing (thus, not changing any code on Facebook's server) and spreading awareness about this possibility. See Sat Apr 2 in Events.

Events

How to use this section

Listings are organised by date and then by type of event. These listings were accurate at the time of going to print but please call the organiser or venue to confirm the details in case of changes.

* denotes agenda pick.

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail (Time Out, 41, Essar House, Old Lakshmi Theater Building, St Johns Road, Bangalore - 560 042) email (listings@timeoutbengaluru.net) or fax (4269-8502) to Akhila Seetharaman. Include details of event, dates, times, address of venue, nearest landmark, telephone number and any entry fee. *Time Out* is a fortnightly publication, appearing on the stands every other Thursday. **Deadline for information is ten days before publication.** Listings are free, but inclusion cannot be guaranteed due to limited space.

Fri Apr 1

Android camp With a plethora of Android applications for Indian users already in the market, and room for many more given its wide user base, there's good reason for developers to show up at a day-long camp on the topic. To register and for details about venue visit www.androidcamp.in. ₹300.

Sat Apr 2

*** FREE Workshop on Facebook Resistance** According to artist Tobias Leingruber, Facebook allows you to design online identities just like IKEA allows you to design your own apartments. While early online networks let users modify their online profiles completely, social networking sites these days have steered "user generated content" into commercially valuable structures, according to user-control advocate Marc Stumpel. Through this workshop, Stumpel helps you become a "browser hack" and think outside of Facebook's existing rules and limitations. As users of technology we have endless choices but don't have the freedom to go against laws and rules of the systems we operate in, said Stumpel. Facebook Resistance is a research initiative that tries to generate creative ideas, which can possibly be converted into real software development. The day-long workshop is open everyone. Web development experience or Photoshop skills would be useful, but people who can write well are also welcome. Register by emailing digitalnatives@cis-india.org. If you have any questions email m.stumpel@gmail.com. Only 20 seats available. *Centre for Internet and Society, 19A, 2nd C Cross, Domlur, 2nd Stage (4114-8130). 11am-5pm.*

Sun Apr 3

FREE Ubuntu Global Jam The

spotlight is on the free community-developed Linux-based operating system, Ubuntu. Named after the African philosophy of shared humanity, the operating system, which has been described as "Linux for human beings", has all the mandatory features such as a web browser, applications for presentations, spreadsheets and text documents, as well as instant messenger. Ubuntu is available for free and can be downloaded from www.ubuntu.com. This fortnight, members of the Ubuntu community come together to improve the operating system. *16/1, Rhenius Street, off Richmond Road, Shanthi Nagar. For details visit www.ubuntu-in.info. 4-5pm.*

Tue Apr 5

FREE Recent nuclear disaster in Japan and lessons for India Nuclear energy expert MR Srinivasan, former head of the Atomic Energy Commission of India, who was among the scientists and engineers chosen by Homi J Bhabha to build India's nuclear program and who went on to play a role in establishing fast breeder reactors for energy production through the Power Projects division, helps make sense of the nuclear disaster in Japan. He has also been a member of the Planning Commission for energy and is currently a member of the National Security Advisory Board. Srinivasan addresses the many questions raised by this crisis and talks about the lessons for India in terms of safety measures in the event of an emergency. *Bangalore International Centre, TERI Complex, 4th Main, 2nd Cross, Domlur 2nd Stage. For details call 98865-99675. 6.30pm.*

Wed Apr 6

FREE The Red Bull Chris Pfeiffer Street Tour 2011 If you missed seeing him burn rubber last year when he visited the city, here's your chance to make up for it. The motorbike stunt riding champion performs in Bangalore as part of a ten-city India tour on his BMW F 800 R and Beta Evo 300 4T. *For details of venue and time visit www.redbull.in. Palace Grounds, 4-6pm.*

Fri Apr 8

Bangalore Weekend of Photography Day 1 Spend the weekend expanding your knowledge about photography at a series of photo-related events geared to interest amateurs, artists and professionals involved in documentary, photo-journalism, wildlife and fashion. Browse through images of the effects of globalisation in Bangalore by a range of photographers at a day-long exhibition at the book store Page Turners. In the evening, participate in Blowup, a street intervention by Blindboys.org that attempts to take photography to the streets. Join local photographers as they convert the urine-stained walls of the hockey stadium opposite Jaaga in Richmond Town into a gallery. Then wash off

the wheat paste glue and walk across the road to Jaaga for an interaction with Sohrab Hura, a photographer known for his personal photo diary *Life is Elsewhere*.

Exhibition at Page Turners, 9, Kannan Building, MG Road (2559-5111). 9am-6pm. Interaction with Sohrab Hura at Jaaga, 16/1, Rhenius Street, off Richmond Road, Shanthi Nagar. Blowup 5-7pm. 7-9pm. For details call Mahesh Shantaram on 99801-29770.

Sat Apr 9

Startup Saturday Bangalore Share your big idea with a group of fellow entrepreneurs and a network of mentors, advisors and investors. Startup Saturdays are tailored to the needs of its audience. The event begins with the demo of a product or service, followed by an hour of knowledge sharing with a panel discussion and then an hour of networking. *For details such as venue and time visit www.startupsaturday.headstart.in.*

Bangalore Weekend of Photography Day 2 Listen to ad photographer Tarunn Solanki talk about glamour photography. Join photographer Mahesh Shantaram in the afternoon as he shares his collection of photo-books that span art, design and photography. Head for the Open Show in the evening: a free monthly event that provides photographers, filmmakers and multimedia producers a chance to present their work. Up to five presenters will showcase their project in ten minutes each and then field questions from the audience. For details visit www.openshow.org/bangalore. *Talk by Solanki at Jaaga, 16/1, Rhenius Street, off Richmond Road, Shanthi Nagar. 10am-12pm. Photography book browsing 3-5pm and Open Show 6-9pm at Page Turners, 9, Kannan Building, MG Road (2559-5111).*

Solid waste management Where does the city's garbage go? Learn about the importance of scientific handling of municipal waste. Also find out about innovative products to tackle waste in a decentralised manner. *For details email kuldeep@theenvironmentgroup.in. Jaaga, 16/1, Rhenius Street, off Richmond Road, Shanthi Nagar. 10.30am-4.30pm.*

Sun Apr 10

Bangalore Weekend of Photography Day 3 Pioneering Indian wildlife photographer TN Perumal talks about the role of wildlife photography in promoting awareness about nature and creating an attitude of conservation at Jaaga in the morning. Watch a documentary titled *The Impassioned Eye* that reveals to audiences a rare late-in-life interview with the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson: this will be at Page Turners in the afternoon. *Talk by Perumal at Jaaga, 16/1, Rhenius Street, off Richmond Road, Shanthi Nagar. 10am. Documentary screening at Page Turners, 9, Kannan Building, MG Road (2559-5111). 1.30pm.*

Tue Apr 12

IPL 2011 Mumbai Indians vs Royal Challengers The fourth season of IPL runs from Fri Apr 8 to Sat May 28. One of the biggest tournaments in the world, IPL T20 will feature 74 matches played across the country. If you're a fan, don't miss the chance to root for the home team on home turf at the season's first match in the city. *For details on how to get tickets visit www.ipltickets.net. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Cubbon Road. 2.30pm.*

By request

Help Japan's earthquake victims The Nippon Foundation, Japan's largest private philanthropic organisation, which has been working in the area of disaster relief since 1962, calls for donations to their fund to help victims of the March 11 earthquake, which registered at a magnitude of 9 on the Richter scale and devastated North-eastern Japan. Since the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 the Foundation has focused on supporting volunteers and civil society organisations. All records of the funds and their deployment will be posted on the website. *For details visit www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng.*

Gender diversity and social transformation course The course seeks to facilitate an understanding of gender, diversity and transformation in Asian and African contexts, and acquaint participants with debates on women's rights, masculinities and the third gender. Familiarise yourself with issues like globalisation, and understand the policies of the government and UN agencies from a gender perspective. Also acquire skills in conducting events and creative documentation. The course is designed for men and women working with government organisations, NGOs and other civil society organisations in Asia and Africa. The course follows Paulo Freire's action-reflection-action model and facilitators will build on participants own experiences and knowledge base. *Last date to register Tue Mar 15. For details visit www.visthar.org or contact Mercy Kappen on mail@visthar.org or mercykappen@yahoo.com. ₹4,000 for Indian nationals. Board and lodging for residential participants available at ₹10,000. ₹23,000 for international participants including board and lodging.*

Critics' choice

Workshop on Facebook Resistance
Sat Apr 2
You are more than your Facebook profile.

Bangalore Weekend of Photography
Fri Apr 8 to Sun Apr 10
Lens caps off, thinking caps on.