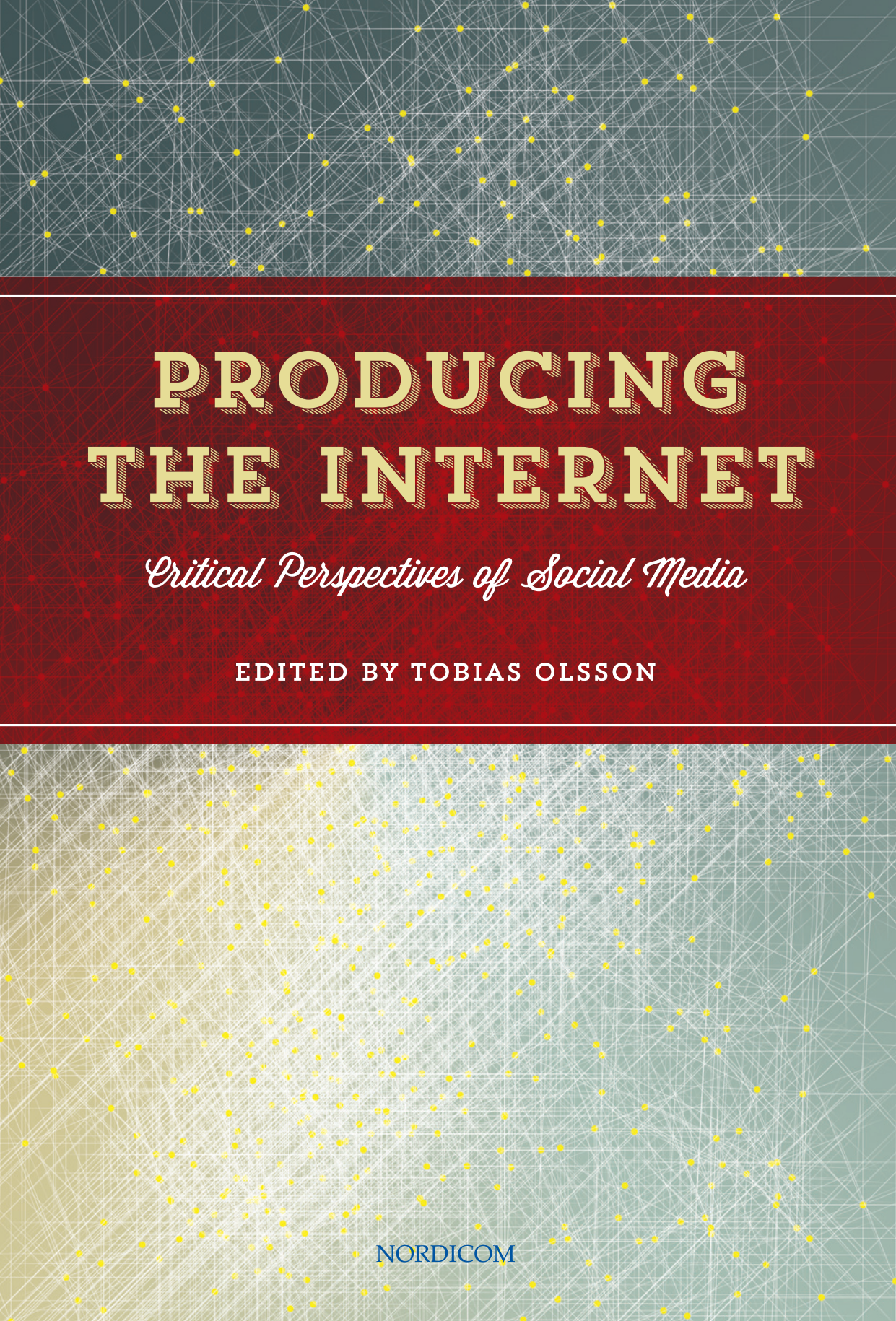




PRODUCING THE INTERNET

Critical Perspectives of Social Media

EDITED BY TOBIAS OLSSON

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Critical Perspectives of Social Media

Tobias Olsson (ed.)

NORDICOM

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Introduction

Tobias Olsson

An analysis that includes the concepts which are of central concern to the contributions in this book – most notably *producers, users, social media, platforms, participation, community* and *power* – can actually start almost anywhere, as these concepts are fundamental to our understanding of almost any part of the contemporary, digital media world. So, for no particular reason, let us start very far out, in what appears to be the very periphery, at least at a first glance; let's start with jogging.

During the last couple of years, jogging has made a big comeback as form of everyday exercise, all over the western world, not least in Sweden. There are numerous indicators of this trend: for the eighth consecutive year, in June of 2012, the annual *Stockholm Marathon* broke its record in number of participants (21,122 entries); by September 2011, all 53,000 passes to Sweden's biggest running event for exercisers – *Göteborgsvarvet* (21 km in May 2012) – were sold out; and Sweden's (and the world's) biggest race for cross-country running, *Lidingöloppet*, attracted more than 43,000 participants in the autumn of 2011, which was an all-time high. To be sure, not all participants in these races are Swedes, but the large majority are, and – above all – the large majority of everyday exercisers who run are Swedish. These three races are only the top of the iceberg, as they are the biggest and most famous events. During the last five years or so, a great number of local – and regional – races have also experienced a similar, very steady increase in number of participants as well as interest in their events.

Apart from these statistical facts, the running trend can also easily be spotted in everyday life. In most parks and recreational areas you find joggers at pretty much any time of the day, and in sporting goods stores you immediately encounter a whole range of offers of running equipment. There are shoes, socks, trousers, t-shirts, jackets, and even caps specifically designed for running, in almost all possible colours and shapes (and, of course, all possible price ranges). In the same sporting goods stores you can also purchase even more

expensive artefacts for running (without, of course, suggesting that the other kinds of running equipment could be considered cheap – they could not); such as GPS-watches, pulse monitors, not forgetting head lights for evening running, during the Nordic winter season.

The recent interest in jogging is, however, best understood as a revived interest. In the 1970s and early 1980s, large numbers of Swedish exercisers became part of the international trend of “slow running”, or jogging (Appelblad 2008). As a consequence, a number of Swedish running events were inaugurated at the time, and among them we find both the abovementioned *Stockholm Marathon* (1979) and *Göteborgsvarvet* (1980). A brief look into statistics on participants in the *Stockholm Marathon* reveals patterns of the overall jogging waves between the late 1970s and today, as they have been analysed by experts (Appelblad 2008; Appelblad 2011): There was an increase of participants in the marathon until 1986. Then the number of participants decreased steadily until 1996, from 16,400 in 1986 to 10,400 in 1996. Since 1997, however, there has once again been a steady increase in the number of participants, although it was not until the year 2005 that the number of runners once again was higher than in 1986. Since 2005, however, the number of participants has increased by 24 % – from 17,071 in 2005 to 21,122 in 2012.

According to initialised analyses, there are important differences between the two waves of interest in long distance running. One important difference is that runners of “the second wave” generally run slower than runners of the first wave; runners of “the second wave” seem to be less performance-oriented than runners of the first wave (Appelblad 2008). Another difference between the two is the fact that the latter wave was more immediately commercialised than the first one. Big sporting brands, such as Nike, Adidas, and Asics, have been very quick to make money out of the re-born interest in running; by offering and selling a wide variety of specialised running shoes (even “barefoot shoes” (!)) and an expansive selection of special clothing (usually labelled “functional”). Both these differences, as well as a number of additional ones (for instance the increasing interest in long distance running among older women; the trend’s middle class bias, etc.) are well-worthy of further and more detailed analyses. In the context of this book, however, there is another important difference between the two waves that is of more pressing interest: the fact that the second wave of running has occurred at a time in history when people all over the Western world, not least in Sweden, have access to internet based social networking media.

Jogg.se – Networking the Trend

The revived interest in running as a form of exercise has been accompanied by the establishment and development of a number of internet based social networking platforms, specifically designated for social networking centred on running. In terms of number of users, *jogg.se* is the largest among these platforms in Sweden. It was established as a social networking site in 2006, by two dedicated, non-professional runners. Their ambition was, first, to keep track of one another's training in order to stimulate and encourage everyday exercise, although they rather immediately realized that there was a huge interest also among other joggers to become part of such a network. Today, about six years after its establishment, the network has approximately 150,000 users, including mainly amateur runners, but also some professionals. The site was initially run by the founders themselves, but after a couple of years they needed to hire staff. Today, 10 people are employed to produce and sell the website. According to independent statistics, between the 7th and 11th of May, *jogg.se* had 64,000 unique visitors and 139,000 visits.

But what is the site about? As a runner you are invited to open an account and register as a member, "for free".¹ Once you have registered, you get access to a wide variety of resources offered by the site – for free. The backbone of the whole networking site is that all users are invited to log their training on the website. They continuously – very often right after finishing a running exercise – log running distance, speed, time, and the kind of running exercise they have been carrying out (for instance easy distance running; long distance running; intervals; threshold running etc.) on their individual training log. If they run with a GPS-device (a GPS-watch or a GPS-enabled mobile phone), the site can also generate a map covering the exercise. When users log this information, they also share it with other members of *jogg.se*. The user accounts' default settings make all the training information accessible for all registered members. This is also what most members allow for, even though some members configure more restricted settings in terms of access to their training information.

As a member, you can then keep track of your own training with the help of the website. In this sense, it works as a traditional training log, or diary. The added training value is instead the ability to read other people's logs, and potentially get inspired by their training, and to allow for others to see your training, which they can comment on and "like" in a way that is very similar to the possibilities offered to Facebook users. Your training gets added into a calendar in which you can follow your exercise month by month. The website also accumulates your training over time in a way that makes it possible for you to continuously follow both your own and other members' training progress.

As stated, the ability to log your own training and to follow other members' training makes up the networking site's very backbone. Another important part

of the site is the discussion forum. Here all users are allowed to participate in discussions related to training. Any member is allowed to start a new discussion thread and all members are invited to contribute. Having followed this forum fairly closely for more than one year,² it becomes very obvious that the forum is productive when it comes to training. Most of the initialized threads remain focused on topics related to training – “What kind of training do you need if you want to run faster?” “How much rest does one need in-between speed workouts?” “What do you eat before running a marathon?”, etc. – and most answers deal with the questions in a serious way, sometimes very ambitiously. The discussion threads do, however, also have other dimensions, that have a more socializing, humoristic character, and are less focused on training per se; for instance the longstanding discussion on the qualities of beer as a recovery drink.

These two pillars of the social networking site are produced by users themselves. They log their own training, share their training, and comment on other members’ training. They also start discussion threads and comment within discussion threads initiated by other users. Of course, the platform – as well as its specific functions – is offered to the users by *jogg.se* for free, but it is the users themselves that provide the networking site with its actual content. This is equally true when it comes to the website’s event calendar. It informs users about upcoming running events, and all of the information about these events is provided by the users themselves. To the list of content provided by users, we can also add that *jogg.se* has a number of featured (but not paid) bloggers, which appear immediately on the website’s first page.

Although, a few important parts of the networking site are in fact not produced by users. *Jogg.se* provides members with training programs for varying running capabilities, on three different distances: 10 km; 21 km (half marathon); and 42 km (marathon). The website also occasionally offers shorter articles discussing issues concerning training, not least articles on various tests of material – of running shoes, and of workout clothing.

Jogg.se = Web 2.0?

At first glance it might appear exceptionally particular to describe a social networking application for runners in such detail. Despite its contemporary popularity, running is obviously still a niche interest, involving only small parts of the Swedish internet users, and far from all runners are connected to *jogg.se*. We also need to add that Sweden is nothing but a very small island in a big internet universe. Still, *jogg.se*’s small scale, and the transparency and sense of control offered by its relative smallness, has its pedagogical points. As we will see below, several of the generic features of the contemporary web are

actually found on *jogg.se*. It is a small site, but works by the very same logic as major social networking actors, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or YouTube.

Since 2005, the internet has often been referred to as the “web 2.0”. The term was coined by Tim O’Reilly (2005), who had the ambition to point to what he perceived to be new and improved about the web, as it had developed during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Having a great interest in computer technology per se, O’Reilly’s analysis was mainly pointing towards the improved web’s technical features, such as “light-weight programming” and the use of the internet as a “technological platform”. He nevertheless also made some reflections concerning social and cultural implications of these features. He thought of the “web 2.0” in terms of a “richer user experience” and also pointed towards new possibilities to “harness collective intelligence”.

Inspired by these new technological features, a number of scholars have made extensive reflections on the potential societal and cultural significance of “web 2.0”. Henry Jenkins has for instance pondered on these web features in terms of convergence culture (Jenkins 2006a), and participatory culture (Jenkins 2006b), stressing the way in which the “web 2.0” creates an infrastructure for user participation and user led co-construction. Rather similarly, in the updated edition of his best-selling book, *The Long Tail*, Chris Anderson analyses “web 2.0” as carrying “democratized tools of production and distribution” (2009:84). Clay Shirky argues along the same line when he identifies the emergence of new organizational forms that “increase our ability to share, to cooperate [...], and to take collective action” (2008:20f). It is also fairly easy to point to a great number of contemporary web applications that do offer such participatory opportunities. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube – and in this specific case Jogg.se – are all very popular applications that inspire precisely sharing, cooperation and participation.

These opportunities offered by the new, improved web environment have also triggered a whole range of additional theoretical debates regarding the contemporary media ecology (Olsson 2010). Among other things, these debates have been concerned with understanding what happens with the well-worn notions of *producers* and *users* in the contexts offered by “web 2.0”-applications: Who is actually a “producer” today, and how should we understand the traditional “user” when he or she also produces content? Is perhaps pro-sumer (Tofler 1980; Ritzer & Jurgensson 2010) a more relevant concept to capture the new circumstances?

The fact that opportunities offered by the “web 2.0” blur established distinctions between producers and users has – in turn – triggered theoretical debates around a number of additional concepts. Central among these concepts is the very idea of *social media* (Russo and Peacock 2009) that are based on various social networking *platforms* (Gillespie 2009; van Dijck 2009). Such platforms offer opportunities for users’ *participation* (Carpentier 2011; Olsson & Svensson

2012) which – among other things – includes abilities to produce *user generated content* (Örnebring 2008), create new forms of *community* and relativize established notions of organizations and *organizing*. Underneath these conceptual issues runs a specifically fundamental question regarding contemporary notions of users and producers: What do these transformations mean for the established *power* relation between users and producers (Castells 2009)?

As an illustrated, introductory analysis we will briefly touch upon these concepts through the lens offered by *jogg.se*. This makes up the basis for a short presentation of the chapters of this volume, paying special attention to how the book's different contributions interplay with and add to contemporary theoretical debates regarding these concepts.

Jogg.se: Conceptual Reflections

In their reflections on how museums can handle the participatory mode of “web 2.0”, Russo and Peacock (2009) have reflected on the concept *social media* itself at some length. To them, social media are open “web 2.0” spaces for user participation and contribution, which invite users to participate and become part of a particular web space. Looked upon from such a point of departure, *jogg.se* certainly qualifies as a social media space, as it is a web space that is open for anyone who is interested in joining, at least as long as they register as users. The web space is also equally open for all members to log their own training, comment on others' training, and to participate in discussions.

Jogg.se can thus be understood as a social media *platform* (Gillespie 2009); the company provides Swedish joggers with a web based, open platform for mutual exchange and contributions. In terms of content, however, the platform is almost completely dependent on its users' production and interaction; the *user generated content* makes up the very pillar of the platform. It is the labour of everyday exercisers – both in terms of their training and the labour put into logging training, commenting in debates and discussing on *jogg.se* – that is the backbone of the website. This is labour put in “for free” by everyday users, who willingly, and happily, contribute to making the space into an attractive web venue.

Within contemporary media research, content providing practices such as the ones presented by users of *jogg.se*, are very often conceptualized as *participatory* practices (cf. Cammaerts 2009; van Dijck 2009; Carpentier 2010; Olsson & Svensson 2012). There are wide-ranging discussions behind the notion of participation, which are inspired by different theories of participation, from political philosophy (Pateman 1970), cultural studies (Fiske 1989) and studies of communication in developmental contexts (Servaes 2008). In the case of *jogg.se*, however, it suffices to point out how the platform per se is an open

environment, inviting all interested users to participate in content production. As such, it is indeed a participatory platform. Still, when thinking of participation within internet environments, it is important to emphasise that even within seemingly participatory environments, it is perfectly possible to both steer and format such practices (Olsson & Svensson 2012).

Ever since the internet's big breakthrough into western societies, in the mid-1990s, it has also often been analysed with reference to its potential ability to create *community* (cf. Rheingold 1994; Jones 1994), and the invention of the "web 2.0" has certainly not made this thread of theorizing any less prevalent. Community is of course in itself a notoriously tricky and contested concept, but it is still useful for describing some instances of *jogg.se*, as it is a very typical internet community in several respects. For instance, it is based on a niche interest, which people can gather around. Despite the fact that it is a Swedish community, it is indeed a community that enables spatially scattered people to meet and interact on a daily basis around the niche interest that they have in common. It is furthermore typical that it also functions as a community for knowledge exchange concerning the communal interest. The discussion threads hold concrete tips for running exercise, offered by the members, for the members. They furthermore hold several examples of identity construction, not only formation of an identity as a member of *jogg.se* itself, but also more generally an identity formation as a runner. With discussion threads such as "You know that you are a true runner when ...", in which all members are invited to contribute with their own definitions of what makes a runner, the identity as a member of *Jogg.se* – and as a runner – is continuously invoked and confirmed.

What kind of media *organization* is *jogg.se*? The blurred boundary between producers and users certainly confuses the notion of "media organization" in the traditional sense of the word. Who is inside the organization, and who is outside? Are the members of *jogg.se* insiders, or are the actual insiders the ten people working on the production of the site? In the more traditional media world, the answers to such issues were of course not always self-evident. Traditional media formats, such as letters to the editor (Lundell 2002), and phone-in-shows in radio (Lunt & Livingstone 1994) and television (Carpentier 2001), have always played with media organizational boundaries, but it was still easier to make a clearer sense of who was actually inside or outside a media organization. Contemporary "web 2.0"-environments, however, make such distinction notoriously unclear, and I would argue that the research literature stressing notions such as participatory culture (Deuze 2006; Jenkins 2006a; Jenkins & Deuze 2008), prod-usage (Bruns 2008), or prod-user, have not really been that helpful in making good sense of what is going on. This literature has – instead – mythologized, rather than analysed, these changes. For instance, these authors has managed to make it appear as if the power relation

between producers and users is about to become levelled out by participatory “web 2.0”-environments; that the former “users” have gained power from the former “producers”.

Jogg.se does make it rather obvious that the former “users” can have fairly rich participatory opportunities in a “web 2.0”-environment, but do these opportunities also transform into *power*? What we see at *jogg.se* is mainly – arguably – content generated by users and the users’ participation. One could, however, actually argue that the users in fact work for *jogg.se*, but for free. *Jogg.se* provides a platform on which users produce content, but they do not get paid for doing it. The content produced by users is also what attracts additional users, who share the interest in running as form for exercise. Once they start using *jogg.se*, the website’s traffic increases, which – in turn – attracts attention from advertisers (Smythe 1981; Fuchs 2010). At the time of writing, trademarks such as Nike, Craft, and Asics, all have banners on *jogg.se*’s starting page. These advertisers do not only get attention from a fairly large group of users, but moreover, from a group of users who are dedicated to activities that their products are designed for. This is also very clearly pointed out as a selling point by the producers of the site:

Jogg.se is a venue, which our users have a clear sense of belonging to. They stay for a long time and they often return. As this is where one meets likeminded people, discuss and exchange experiences, advertising related to training reaches straight into its target group. Hence, relevant products gain a lot of attention, generate many clicks, and are often discussed in the forum. [...] For special needs, campaigns can be controlled in terms of areas of residence, gender, or age group (*jogg.se*, “About”-section, my translation from Swedish).

In terms of the power relation between users and producers, these facts make the situation complicated. The users of *jogg.se*, a *social medium*, are provided with the ability to *participate* on a *platform* provided by a company; they are to some extent not only traditional users, but also producing users that generate content – the sort of users that are sometimes referred to as “prod-users” or “prosumers”. As a consequence, the platform appears a lot like a *community* of people with a great interest in running in common, loosely organized around this with the help of the internet venue. Still, the content provided by users is appropriated by *jogg.se*. They make use of it in order to attract both additional members and advertisers. In this sense, *jogg.se* manages both to provide a platform for a networking community, and to commercialise the revived interest in running as a form for everyday exercise.

Jogg.se is, of course, only a very small social media platform within a large universe of similar ones. Still, this seemingly marginal case makes it perfectly possible to touch upon several issues that concern the chapters within this

book. To varying degrees and with varying emphasis, they ponder who is a producer today, and who is a user – or should we rather be talking about “prod-users”? They reflect on and analyse various social media platforms, and what it actually means to participate. They dig into internet communities; the ways in which they are organized and – not least – issues of power and control within the media environment, brought about by the more “interactive” and “user-friendly” web. To put it short: they all want to make sense of various aspects of what it means – for various actors in various contexts – to have access to and make use of a seemingly more participatory media environment.

A Short Review of the Chapters

The book is divided into four sections that organize the chapters according to their main areas of interest. The first section is named “Producing Social Media Platforms: Power and Organization” and is mainly concerned with overarching, theoretical aspects. The chapters of this part of the book analyse questions such as: Who is a producer of social media? Who has power within social media? Can media be organized for genuine participation?

The focus of the second chapter is issues of power within social media, “Social Media and Capitalism”, by Christian Fuchs. It is a critical analysis of propositions regarding social media as a participatory space that empowers traditional media users into becoming prod-users, or prosumers (Toffler 1980). Fuchs argues that “[c]orporate social media are not a realm of user/prosumer participation, but a realm of Internet prosumer commodification and exploitation.” Departing from Karl Marx’s theory of capital accumulation, Fuchs argues that the internet brings further exploitation of media users. Prior to the internet, media users were commodified as audiences for commercial messages (Smythe 1981). With the internet, they are also commodified in their role as producers of commercial content.

The questions “what are social media platforms?”, and “who produces them?” are of central concern to José van Dijck in the third chapter, “Social Media Platforms as Producers”. Drawing on Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network-Theory, she conceptualizes social networking media, such as Facebook, or *jogg.se*, as having two levels: one level of “politico-legal economy”, including ownership, labour, and “issues about privacy and intellectual property”, and a second level of “technologically steered socio-cultural interaction”. Within this chapter, her main concern is the latter aspect, and by analysing the movie *Catfish* – a documentary inspired by social media – she illustrates very clearly how the interaction between technological opportunities offered by the platform, and creative user appropriations, make social media eternally unfinished products, or rather “processes (or services) that are never finished; their endless, evolving

dynamics – always adapting the platform to new challenges, whether posed by users or other platforms – are indeed inherently part of the production process”.

In his chapter “The Participatory Organization: Alternative Models for Organizational Structure and Leadership”, Nico Carpentier is centrally concerned with participation, and more specifically theoretical and practical prerequisites for organizing media organizations in such a way that they allow for democratic participation. Drawing on Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theoretical work, Carpentier makes use of two opposing metaphors for analysing the participatory potential of different media organizations – the arbolescent and the rhizomatic. He writes: “The arbolescent is a structure that is linear, hierarchic and sedentary, and can be represented as [tree-like]. The rhizomatic, on the other hand, links to organic organizations and their networks. The rhizomatic is non-linear, anarchic and nomadic.” For organizing mediated, democratic participation; rhizomatic – fluid, network like, ephemeral – organizations are superior to arbolescent ones (structured, hierarchic), and by pointing to the sphere of alternative community media Carpentier also exemplifies that such organizations – as well as forms for real participation – are actually practically possible.

All three chapters in the second section of the book, “Transforming Media Producers”, have a common concern: How do media producers – the media organizations, their professions, etc. – of the established media world (of television, newspapers) make sense of and handle the media environment brought about by the new, more interactive web? In chapter five, “Dirty Work: Why Journalists Shun Reader Comments”, Dino Viscovi and Malin Gustafsson analyse how the journalistic profession, and its culture, appropriate the fact that the internet has offered readers enhanced participatory possibilities. How do journalists evaluate the content that readers have on offer (user-generated content)? “Not always very highly”, one could argue in the light of the material presented by Viscovi and Gustafsson. Media professionals do see both democratic and economic potential in users’ participation, but they also consider it to result in “impure” content, as it is not derived from journalistic standards and professional knowledge.

Ulrika Sjöberg and Ingegerd Rydin look into a specific production for children – the dramablog Vilma.se (“Transmedia Storytelling and a Young Audience: Public Service in the Blogosphere Era”). They perceive of Vilma.se as a case that highlights how Swedish public service television navigates between two opposing logics: the traditional logic of broadcasting and the emerging logic of convergence. In producing Vilma, Swedish Television combines traditional formats for TV-production with a high degree of presence in social media. Hence, in their concluding section, Sjöberg and Rydin argue that: “Vilma.se exemplifies how a public service [company] i) becomes a social medium, ii) uses previously existing social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, and iii) tries to increase its involvement through participation and personal communicative style.”

María Isabel Villa is similarly interested in public service organizations and particularly their ways of appropriating digital media. More concretely, departing from the Actor-Network-Theory derived from Bruno Latour, she has followed TV-productions within the Catalan public service company. In her ethnographic analyses of production practices, she pays special heed to how broadcasters both produce for and move between different platforms (TV, internet, mobile phones). Her chapter centres on questions such as: How do producers negotiate with the digital, technological opportunities offered to them in terms of various platforms? How do they organize their work to be functional in a multiplatform environment?

The three chapters of the third part of the book – “Producers of Communities/Communities of Producers” – have different social media communities as their objects of study. The communities analysed differ – produced by commercial actors vs. produced by public organizations, produced for young people vs. produced for grownups, etc. – but the chapters nevertheless share an interest in coming to terms with what kind of space a community is, within the realm of social media. What does it mean to participate within them? How are they organized?

Maria Bakardjieva’s chapter, “Bringing up Bg-mamma: Organized Producers between Community and Commerce”, looks into a Bulgarian community for parents and parenting. It started off as a small scale community that was loosely produced by enthusiasts sharing parenting experiences, but was eventually bought by a media company and is now run in a more commercial manner. This, argues Bakardjieva, makes the community a kind of hybrid community, balancing between a “top-down”- and/or “bottom up”-logic. She argues convincingly that “[f]or the time being, I suggest that the example of bg-mamma should be seen as a demonstration of the possibility for user creativity and grass-roots mobilization that this new type of media organization has opened up. As an ideal type it takes an intermediary place between the top-down organization controlled by Producers waging power and capital and the free-wheeling creativity of disorganized small-case ‘producers’.”

Whereas Maria Bakardjieva’s analysis looks into a community that used to be based on the work of volunteers, which now has been turned into a commercial community, Stina Bengtsson’s chapter deals with a government sponsored community – “Malmö in Second Life” (Malmö is Sweden’s third municipality in number of inhabitants) – and its producers’ efforts to navigate within an increasingly commercial internet environment. In her chapter we get to follow the visions behind “Malmö in Second Life”, the launch of the community, as well as the challenges that faced the producers of a “public space” trying to become a part of the cultures of *Second Life*. Stina Bengtsson writes: “Instead of meeting citizens, the Malmö city administration met a vital and changing underground culture, with users that were accustomed to being

producers themselves, and being addressed as, and behaving as, customers. In this context Malmö city turned into a vendor; a salesperson; selling something that very few users of *Second Life* wanted to buy.”

The third chapter within this part of the book, “The Civic Potential of the Digital Horse”, deals with potential civic values of a commercial web community. Anna Lund analyses the web community *stallet.se* (*stallet* translates into The Stables), a commercial web community aiming mainly at young girls. At *stallet.se* members get to take care of digital horses, train them, and compete with them. Apart from these features, however, the community also has a space for discussions between members, which is the part of the web community that has caught Anna Lund’s attention. Departing from theories of the “civic” (engagement and participation), derived from Peter Dahlgren and Jeffrey C. Alexander, she finds that “The ideal of the civil sphere [...] is made possible through this communicative space of the digital horse. [...] The girls and young women visiting *The Stables* are longing for an autonomous position in society. The Internet or more specifically *The Stables* allows for such autonomy. It is not an organized activity with adult leaders; *The Stables* promotes autonomy between equals.”

The theoretical debates regarding “web 2.0” and social media have also inspired substantial amounts of theorizing of the potential civic and political significance of the more participatory web. Such concerns are brought to the centre in the section called “Producing the (Un)Civic Web”. In the first chapter of this part, “Contingencies of Online Political ‘Producers’”, Peter Dahlgren analyses the internet’s significance for the Occupy Wall Street-movement (OWS). Dahlgren conceives of the participants in OWS as political “producers” – they produce their own media in a manner that is both expressive of and constitutive for a new form of political activism. In his analysis Dahlgren approaches OWS from a perspective inspired by Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory, and in his concluding remarks he argues convincingly that: “OWS has contested key features in the hegemonic discourses of late capitalism, offering many people critical subject positions that previously were not possible within the realm of legitimate politics. [...] it has in fact also made available on a broad scale an alternative conception of politics as such”.

Social media, and the internet more generally, are nowadays important resources for all kinds of civic engagement and participation – for information tasks, for communication, for networking, for coordination, etc. Still, within research, very meagre attention has been paid to the fact that these online civic practices also make up a body of labour for the people involved. In Shakuntala Banaji’s and David Buckingham’s chapter – “Creating the Civic Web: Exploring the Perspectives of Web Producers in Europe and Turkey” – this labour is understood as web production, and the people involved as “producers”. Drawing on a large empirical material derived from seven different countries, they analyse production of civic websites with reference to various themes, such

as varying funding models and different forms for promotion. They also look into how various producers conceive and make sense of both young people and the internet per se.

The final chapter, by Anders Svensson, makes a move from the sphere of citizenship and civic action to the sphere of commercial companies and entrepreneurship. It is titled “Adopting Social Media in the Corporate Sphere: The Tricky Route to Monetization of Facebook Fan Pages” and offers a critical interpretation of handbook knowledge of how to make social media helpful to business. Among other things, Svensson identifies a knowledge gap between representatives of management discourses of social media (i.e. producers of handbook knowledge) and the small companies and entrepreneurs for which this knowledge is produced. The knowledge gap transforms into a power relation in which the former ends up selling a social media concept to the latter rather than useful information about how to make use of social media.

A Contextual Note

Most of the chapters in this volume are the result of a symposium in Malmö (Sweden), in May 2011 – “Organized Producers of Net Cultures”. During two days of presentations and discussion of all together 14 research papers, we reflected on all of the central concepts of this book – *producers, users, social media, platforms, participation, community, power* – and many more. In the call for papers for the symposium, the notion of “producers” was particularly stressed:

Can contemporary media culture be understood as a culture that offers unprecedented freedom for producing participators – the so-called “prod-users”? Or should it rather be understood as a culture in which various forms of user participation in fact are conditioned, or even manufactured, by organized, professional Producers (with a capital “P”)? Considering the increasing research attention that has recently been paid to various notions of mediated participation, most often with reference to the so-called “web 2.0”, these questions – as well as a number of similar ones – become important to ask. They call attention to the need to both critically discuss and investigate the supposedly transformative potential of emerging media culture (Unpublished call for papers).

One of the explicit ambitions of the symposium, which also resounds in several of the book chapters, was to resuscitate the very notion of producers within contemporary media research. The call for papers also stated that:

Within recent literature there has been an obvious preference for understanding the internet as a sphere that is dominated by users acting as active,

productive subjects through practices such as blogging and social networking, etc. Hence, research has tended to analytically downplay the part played by producers, despite the fact that they do provide the very platforms on which “prod-users” practices are being played out. As such, organised producers (as opposed to everyday users’ practices as *dis-organized* producers on the internet) make up a category in need of further exploration and analysis; especially in terms of how they make use of various combinations of for instance economic, discursive, and marketing resources in preparing websites, web platforms, or other kinds of venues for everyday users’ media practices (Unpublished call for papers).

We hope that this book meets these ambitions; that its various contributions add on to our understanding and critical knowledge of contemporary media culture, especially regarding the extent to which it is participatory and to what extent various forms of producers (or prod-users) have the power to be influential within various web contexts.³ To us, these are critical issues to analyse in any efforts to understand social networking media.

Notes

1. To be very detailed, one should add that the website has branches for cycling, skiing and swimming as well. In this case, however, we focus on running, which also is its main branch.
2. In methodological terms I can be considered as a participant observer. At the time of writing I have been a member of Jogg.se myself for more than a year and I browse through a substantial amount of the discussion threads on a weekly basis. I’m not, however, one of the frequent contributors to these discussions.
3. The symposium, as well as the book per se, was made possible by a generous research grant from the Swedish Knowledge foundation.

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I

Producing Social Media Platforms

Power and Organization

Social Media and Capitalism

Christian Fuchs

The task of this chapter is to give a critical political economy analysis of social media. The terms “social media” and “web 2.0” have come to be used for signifying world wide web platforms that support community-building and maintenance, the production, circulation and consumption of user-generated content and collaborative information production. On the one hand, these terms overstress novelty and ignore that there are different forms of sociality (such as cognition, communication and co-operation) (see Fuchs 2010a; Fuchs 2011), on the other hand it is a reality that such platforms have not become dominant, but more important on the world wide web (see the statistics on alexa.com). Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), video-, music- and image-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, PirateBay, Spotify), wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs (e.g. Blogger, Wordpress) and microblogs (e.g. Twitter) are popular, but do not account for more than 25 % of the 100 most popular websites (alexa.com, top sites in Sweden, accessed on May 25, 2011) in the world’s most advanced information society.¹

The Limits of the Participatory Social Media Hypothesis

In his analysis of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas (1991) both stressed the enabling and constraining/limiting aspects. On the one hand he describes how modern public spheres enable the formation of public opinion and political debate. On the other hand he points out – by elegant dialectical reasoning – that the bourgeois public sphere creates its own limits and thereby its own immanent critique, by: a) limiting the freedom of speech and public opinion in those cases when persons who do not have the same formal education and material resources for participating in the public spheres are facing unequal conditions of participation and exclusion (Habermas 1991:227); b) limiting the freedom of association and assembly in those cases where big economic

and political organizations “enjoy an oligopoly of the publicistically effective and politically relevant formation of assemblies and associations” (Habermas 1991:228).

Studies of “web 2.0” and “social media” are dominated by techno-deterministic approaches that assume that the rise of these technologies results in a more democratic society. This becomes especially clear when representatives of this approach speak of “participatory social media”. For example, Jenkins argues that increasingly “the Web has become a site of consumer participation” (Jenkins 2008:137), Shirky (2008:107) says that on web 2.0 there is a “linking of symmetrical participation and amateur production”, Tapscott and Williams (2006:15) argue that “the new web” has resulted in “a new economic democracy“, Benkler (2006:15) states that due to commons-based peer production “culture is becoming more democratic: self-reflective and participatory“, Bruns (2008:17) says that Internet produsage allows “participation in networked culture“, Deuze (2007:95) concludes that “new media technologies like the Internet have made visible [...] the participatory engagement of people with their media”. To be fair, one has to say that Deuze (2008) has also written contributions, in which he stresses the “corporate appropriation of participatory culture”.

What all of these contributions miss is a theoretically grounded understanding of participation. Claims about implications for democracy are used, but it is missed that in democratic theory the term “participation” is mainly used and most prominently featured in theories of democracy (Held 2006). The earliest use of the term “participatory democracy” that I could trace in the literature is an article by Staughton Lynd (1965) that describes the grassroots organization of the student movement. Two central features of participatory democracy theory (for a more detailed discussion and its implications for the analysis of social media, see Fuchs 2011:ch. 7) are: a) the broad understanding of democracy as encompassing areas beyond voting, such as the economy, culture, and the household, and b) the questioning of the compatibility of participatory democracy and capitalism. A participatory economy requires a “change in the terms of access to capital in the direction of more nearly equal access” (Macpherson 1973:71) and “a change to more nearly equal access to the means of labour” (Macpherson 1973:73). “Genuine democracy, and genuine liberty, both require the absence of extractive powers” (Macpherson 1973:121). A participatory economy furthermore involves “the democratising of industrial authority structures” (Pateman 1970:43).

Understanding participation as participatory democracy requires us to also analyze the political economy of social media when making judgements about their participatory character. If there are for example asymmetries in terms of visibility and attention, then it is questionable to argue that corporate social media are truly participatory. It is therefore not enough to stress enabling and limiting potentials of the Internet, but one rather needs to analyse the actual

distribution of advantages and disadvantages. The negative aspects of social media need to be further analysed in order to temper the uncritical social media-optimism that is an ideological manifestation of the search for new capital accumulation models, which are based on the exploitation of user labour in order to raise the profit rate in the digital media industry. Critics have stressed in this context that web 2.0 optimism is uncritical and an ideology that serves corporate interests (van Dijck and Nieborg 2009; Fuchs 2011), or that web 2.0 users are more passive users than active creators (van Dijck 2009). Olsson (2010) questions web 2.0-optimism by stressing that the dominance of the Internet by organized producers cannot be easily overthrown by users of blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

Table 1. The Most Viewed YouTube Videos of All Times

Rank	Video	Type	Ownership	Views
1	Justin Bieber - Baby	Music	Universal	549 million
2	Lady Gaga – Bad Romance	Music	Universal	381 m
3	Shakira – Waka Waka	Music	Sony	345 m
4	Eminem – Love the Way You Lie	Music	Universal	337 m
5	Charlie bit my finger – again!	Entertainment	Private user	326 m
6	Eminem – Not Afraid	Music	Universal	238 m
7	Miley Cyrus – Party in the USA	Music	Walt Disney	220 m
8	Justin Bieber – Never say never	Music	Universal	211 m
9	Jennifer Lopez – On the floor	Music	Universal	188 m
10	Tootin' bathtub baby cousins	Entertainment	Demand Media Inc.	187 m

Source: youtube.com, accessed on May 24, 2011.

The analysis of the ten most viewed videos on YouTube (see table 1) shows that transnational media corporations, the organized exploiters of surplus labour-generating labour, control YouTube's political attention economy. Entertainment and music is very popular on YouTube and Facebook (see also table 2), politics is a minority interest. An analysis of Facebook groups shows that the most popular ones are in the areas of IT and entertainment, politics is of minor interest and is dominated by dominant actors such as Obama, whereas alternative political figures like Michael Moore, Noam Chomsky and Karl Marx have a much lower number of fans (table 2).

Table 2. The Most Popular Fan Groups on Facebook

Rank	Facebook Group	Type	Number of Fans
1	Texas Hold'em Poker	Game	43 million
2	Facebook	IT	41 m
3	Eminem	Music	36 m
4	Lady Gaga	Music	34 m
5	YouTube	IT	33 m
6	Rihanna	Music	33 m
7	Michael Jackson	Music	33 m
8	Family Guy	Entertainment	30 m
9	Linkin Park	Music	28 m
10	Justin Bieber	Music	28 m
33	Barack Obama	Politics	20 m
	Michael Moore	Alternative media producer	440 thousand fans
	Noam Chomsky	Political intellectual	283 thousand fans
	Karl Marx	Political philosopher, communist	177 thousand fans

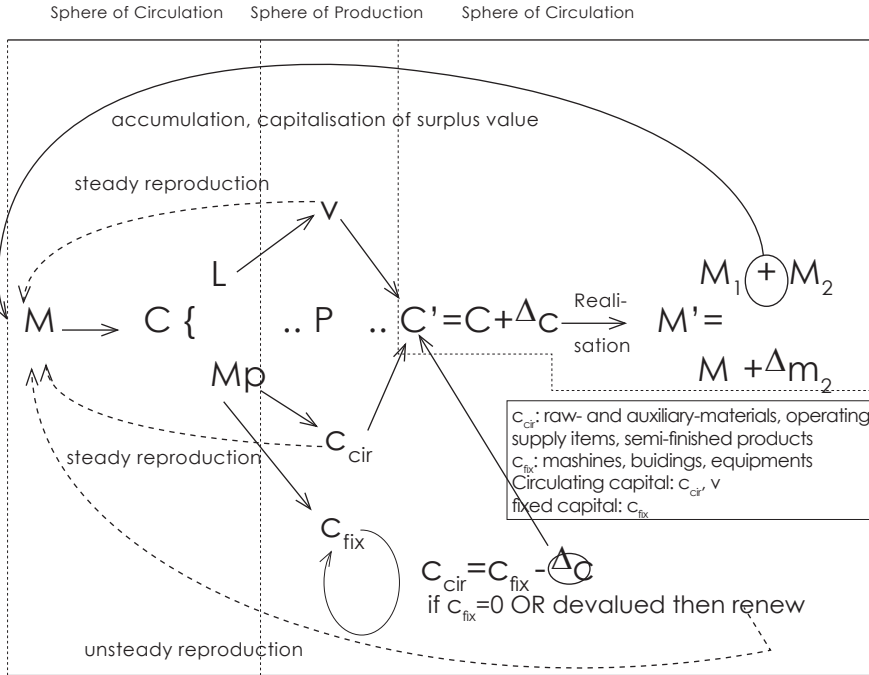
Source: <http://statistics.allfacebook.com>, accessed on May 24, 2011.

Such data show that social media and the Internet are dominated by corporations and that the Internet is predominantly capitalist in character. Taking the idea of participatory democracy serious means in this light to conclude that the Internet and social media are today stratified, non-participatory spaces and that an alternative, non-corporate Internet is needed (see Fuchs 2011:ch. 7-9). For critical empirical analyses of the political economy of social media, also theoretical foundations are needed, which can best be achieved by grounding analyses in the works of the founding figure of critical political economy – Karl Marx.

The Cycle of Capital Accumulation

In the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx analyses the process of capital accumulation. This process, as described by Marx, is visualized in figure 1.

In the accumulation of capital, capitalists buy labour power and means of production (raw materials, technologies, etc.) in order to produce new commodities that are sold with the expectation to make money profit that is partly reinvested. Marx distinguishes two spheres of capital accumulation: the circulation sphere and the sphere of production. In the circulation sphere, capital transforms its value form: First money *M* is transformed into commodities (from the standpoint of the capitalist as buyer), the capitalist purchases the commodities labour power *L* and means of production *M_p*. *M-C* is based on the two purchases *M-L* and *M-M_p*. This means that due to private property structures workers do not own the means of production, the products they

Figure 1. The Accumulation/Expanded Reproduction of Capital


produce, and the profit they generate. Capitalists own these resources. In the sphere of production, a new good is produced: the value of labour power and the value of the means of production are added to the product. Value takes on the form of productive capital P . The value form of labour is variable capital v (which can be observed as wages), the value form of the means of production constant capital c (which can be observed as the total price of the means of production/producer goods).

In the sphere of production, capital stops its metamorphosis so that capital circulation comes to a halt. New value V' of the commodity is produced, V' contains the value of the necessary constant and variable capital and surplus value s of the surplus product. Surplus value is generated by unpaid labour. Capitalists do not pay for the production of surplus, therefore the production of surplus value can be considered as a process of exploitation. The value V' of the new commodity after production is $V' = c + v + s$. The commodity then leaves the sphere of production and again enters the circulation sphere, in which capital conducts its next metamorphosis: By being sold on the market it is transformed from the commodity form back into the money form. Surplus value is realized in the form of money value. The initial money capital M now takes on the form $M' = M + .m$, it has been increased by an increment $.m$.

Accumulation of capital means that the produced surplus value is (partly) reinvested/capitalized. The end point of one process M' becomes the starting point of a new accumulation process. One part of M' , M_1 , is reinvested. Accumulation means the aggregation of capital by investment and exploitation in the capital circuit $M-C..P..C'-M'$, in which the end product M' becomes a new starting point M . The total process makes up the dynamic character of capital. Capital is money that is permanently increasing due to the exploitation of surplus value.

Commodities are sold at prices that are higher than the investment costs so that money profit is generated. For Marx, one decisive quality of capital accumulation is that profit is an emergent property of production that is produced by labour, but owned by the capitalists.

Without labour no profit could be made. Workers are forced to enter class relations and to produce profit in order to survive, which enables capital to appropriate surplus. The notion of exploited surplus value is the main concept of Marx's theory, by which he intends to show that capitalism is a class society. "The theory of surplus value is in consequence immediately the theory of exploitation" (Negri 1991:74) and, one can add, the theory of class and as a consequence the political demand for a classless society.

Capital is not money, but money that is increased through accumulation, "money which begets money" (Marx 1867/1976:256). Marx argues that the value of labour power is the average amount of time that is needed for the production of goods that are necessary for survival (necessary labour time), which in capitalism is paid for by workers with their wages. Surplus labour time is labour time that exceeds necessary labour time, remains unpaid, is appropriated for free by capitalists, and transformed into money profit. Surplus value "is in substance the materialization of unpaid labour-time. The secret of the self-valorization of capital resolves itself into the fact that it has at its disposal a definite quantity of the unpaid labour of other people" (Marx 1867/1976:672). The production of surplus value is "the differentia specifica of capitalist production" (Marx 1867/1976:769) and the "driving force and the final result of the capitalist process of production" (Marx 1867/1976:976).

A Critique of the Political Economy of Social Media

Many corporate social media platforms accumulate capital with the help of targeted advertising that is tailored to individual user data and behaviour. Capitalism is based on the imperative to accumulate ever more capital. To achieve this, capitalists either have to prolong the working day (absolute surplus value production) or to increase the productivity of labour (relative surplus value production) (on relative surplus value, see Marx 1867/1976:ch.

12). Relative surplus value production means that productivity is increased so that more commodities and more surplus value can be produced in the same time period as before:

For example, suppose a cobbler, with a given set of tools, makes one pair of boots in one working day of 12 hours. If he is to make two pairs in the same time, the productivity of his labour must be doubled; and this cannot be done except by an alteration in his tools or in his mode of working, or both. Hence the conditions of production of his labour, i.e. his mode of production, and the labour process itself, must be revolutionized. By an increase in the productivity of labour, we mean an alteration in the labour process of such a kind as to shorten the labour-time socially necessary for the production of a commodity, and to endow a given quantity of labour with the power of producing a greater quantity of use-value. [...] I call that surplus-value which is produced by lengthening of the working day, *absolute surplus-value*. In contrast to this, I call that surplus-value which arises from the curtailment of the necessary labour-time, and from the corresponding alteration in the respective lengths of the two components of the working day, *relative surplus-value* (Marx 1867/1976:431f).

Sut Jhally (1987:78) argues that “reorganizing the watching audience in terms of demographics” is a form of relative surplus value production. Targeted internet advertising can also be interpreted as a form of relative surplus value production: At one point in time, not only one advertisement is shown to the audience by the advertisers as in non-targeted advertising, but different advertisements are shown to different user groups depending on the monitoring, assessment and comparison of their interests and online behaviour. On traditional forms of television, all watchers see the same advertisements at the same time. In targeted online advertising, advertising companies can present different ads at the same time. The efficiency of advertising is increased, more advertisements that are likely to fit the interests of consumers are shown in the same time period as before. These advertisements are partly produced by the advertising company’s wage labourers and partly by the Internet users, whose user-generated data and transaction data are utilized. The more targeted advertisements there are, the more likely it is that users recognize ads and click on them.

The click-and-buy process by users is the surplus value realization process of the advertising company. Targeted advertising allows Internet companies to present not just one advertisement at one point in time to users, but numerous advertisements; so more advertising time is in total produced and presented as a commodity by internet companies to users.

Relative surplus value production means that more surplus value is generated in the same time period as earlier. Targeted online advertising is more productive than non-targeted online advertising because it allows presenting

more ads in the same time period. These ads contain more surplus value than the non-targeted ads, i.e., more unpaid labour time of the advertising company's paid employees and of users, who generate user-generated content and transaction data.

Alvin Toffler (1980) introduced the notion of the prosumer in the early 1980s. It means the "progressive blurring of the line that separates producer from consumer" (Toffler 1980:267).

Toffler describes the age of prosumption as the arrival of a new form of economic and political democracy, self-determined work, labour autonomy, local production, and autonomous self-production. But he overlooks that prosumption is used for outsourcing work to users and consumers, who work without payment. Thereby corporations reduce their investment costs and labour costs, jobs are destroyed, and consumers who work for free are extremely exploited. They produce surplus value that is appropriated and turned into profit by corporations without paying wages. Notwithstanding Toffler's uncritical optimism, his notion of the "prosumer" describes important changes of media structures and practices and can therefore also be adopted for critical studies.

Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) argue that web 2.0 facilitates the emergence of "prosumer capitalism", that the capitalist economy "has always been dominated by prosumption" (ibid.:14) and that prosumption is an inherent feature of McDonaldisation. Prosumption is one of several tendencies in capitalism, but not the only quality of capitalism. Capitalism is multidimensional and has multiple interlinked dimensions; it is at the same time finance capitalism, imperialistic capitalism, informational capitalism, hyperindustrial capitalism (oil), crisis capitalism, etc. Not all of these dimensions are equally important (Fuchs 2011:ch. 5).

Dallas Smythe (1981/2006) suggests that in the case of media advertisement models, the audience is sold as a commodity to advertisers:

Because audience power is produced, sold, purchased and consumed, it commands a price and is a commodity. [...] You audience members contribute your unpaid work time and in exchange you receive the program material and the explicit advertisements (Smythe 1981/2006:233,238).

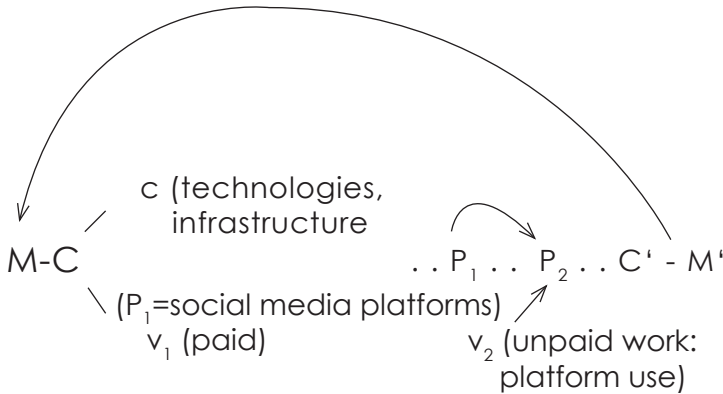
With the rise of user-generated content, free access social networking platforms, and other free access platforms that yield profit by online advertisement – a development subsumed under categories such as web 2.0, social software, and social networking sites – the web seems to come close to accumulation strategies employed by the capital on traditional mass media like TV or radio. The users who upload photos, and images, write wall posting and comments, send mail to their contacts, accumulate friends or browse other profiles on Facebook, constitute an audience commodity that is sold to advertisers. The difference between the audience commodity on traditional mass media and

on the Internet is that, in the latter case, the users are also content producers; there is user-generated content, the users engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building, and content-production. That the users are more active on the Internet than in the reception of TV or radio content, is due to the decentralized structure of the internet, which allows many-to-many communication. Due to the permanent activity of the recipients and their status as prosumers, we can say that in the case of corporate social media the audience commodity is an Internet prosumer commodity (Fuchs 2010b).

Surveillance on corporate social media is surveillance of prosumers, who dynamically and permanently create and share user-generated content, browse profiles and data, interact with others, join, create, and build communities, and co-create information. The corporate web platform operators and their third party advertising clients continuously monitor and record personal data and online activities; they store, merge, and analyse collected data. This allows them to create detailed user profiles and to know about the personal interests and online behaviors of the users. Social media that are based on targeted advertising sell prosumers as a commodity to advertising clients. Money is exchanged for the access to user data that allows economic surveillance of the users. The exchange value of the social media prosumer commodity is the money value that the operators obtain from their clients; its use value is the multitude of personal data and usage behaviour that is dominated by the commodity and exchange value form. The surveillance of the prosumers' permanently produced use values, i.e., personal data and interactions, by corporations allows targeted advertising that aims at luring the prosumers into consumption and at manipulating their desires and needs in the interest of corporations and the commodities they offer.

Social media prosumers are double objects of commodification: they are commodities themselves and through this commodification their consciousness becomes, while online, permanently exposed to commodity logic in the form of advertisements. Most online time is advertising time. On corporate social media, personal data, interests, interactions with others, information behaviour, and also the interactions with other websites are used for targeted advertising. So while you are using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc, it is not just you interacting with others and browsing profiles, all of these activities are framed by advertisements presented to you. These advertisements come about by permanent surveillance of your online activities. Such advertisements do not necessarily represent consumers' real needs and desires because the ads are based on calculated assumptions, whereas needs are much more complex and spontaneous. The ads mainly reflect marketing decisions and economic power relations – much information about actors who do not have the financial power to buy advertisements, but who may nonetheless be interesting and relate to the same topic, is left out.

Figure 2. Capital Accumulation on Corporate Social Media Platforms that Are Based on Targeted Advertising



C' = **Internet prosumer commodity** (user-generated content, transaction data, virtual advertising space and time)
 most social media services are free to use, they are no commodities.
 User data and the users are the social media commodity.

Figure 2 shows the process of capital accumulation on corporate social media platforms that are funded by targeted advertising. Social media corporations invest money (M) for buying capital: technologies (server space, computers, organizational infrastructure, etc.) and labour power (paid employees). These are the constant capital (c) and the variable capital v_1 outlays.

The outcome of the production process P_1 is not a commodity that is directly sold, but rather social media services (the specific platforms) that are made available without payment to users. The waged employees, who create social media online environments that are accessed by users, produce part of the surplus value. The users make use of the platform for generating content that they upload (user-generated data). The constant and variable capital invested by social media companies (c , v_1) that is objectified in the online environments is the prerequisite for their activities in the production process P_2 . Their products are user-generated data, personal data, and transaction data about their browsing behaviour and communication behaviour on corporate social media. They invest a certain labour time v_2 in this process.

Corporate social media sell the users' data commodity to advertising clients at a price that is larger than the invested constant and variable capital. The surplus value contained in this commodity is partly created by the users, partly by the corporations' employees. The difference is that the users are unpaid and therefore infinitely exploited. Once the Internet prosumer commodity that

contains the user-generated content, transaction data, and the right to access virtual advertising space and time is sold to advertising clients, the commodity is transformed into money capital and surplus value is realized into money capital.

For Marx (1867/1976), the profit rate is the relation of profit to investment costs: $p = s / (c + v) = \text{surplus value} / (\text{constant capital (= fixed costs)} + \text{variable capital (= wages)})$. If internet users become productive web 2.0 prosumers, then in terms of Marxian class theory this means that they become productive labourers who produce surplus value and are exploited by capital, because for Marx productive labour generates surplus (Fuchs 2010b). Therefore not merely those who are employed by web 2.0 corporations for programming, updating, and maintaining the soft- and hardware, performing marketing activities, etc., are exploited surplus value producers, but also the users and prosumers, who engage in the production of user-generated content. New media corporations do not (or hardly) pay the users for the production of content. One accumulation strategy is to give them free access to services and platforms, let them produce content, and to accumulate a large number of prosumers that are sold as a commodity to third-party advertisers. Not a product is sold to the users, but the users are sold as a commodity to advertisers. The more users a platform has, the higher the advertising rates can be set. The productive labour time that is exploited by capital on the one hand involves the labour time of the paid employees, and on the other hand all of the time that is spent online by the users. For the first type of knowledge labour, new media corporations pay salaries. The second type of knowledge is produced completely for free. There are neither variable nor constant investment costs. The formula for the profit rate needs to be transformed for this accumulation strategy:

$$p = s / (c + v1 + v2)$$

s: surplus value, c : constant capital, v1: wages paid to fixed employees,
v2: wages paid to users

The typical situation is that $v2 \Rightarrow 0$ and that v2 substitutes v1 ($v1 \Rightarrow v2=0$). If the production of content and the time spent online were carried out by paid employees, the variable costs would rise and profits would therefore decrease. This shows that prosumer activity in a capitalist society can be interpreted as the outsourcing of productive labour to users, who work completely for free and help maximizing the rate of exploitation ($e = s / v = \text{surplus value} / \text{variable capital}$) so that profits can be raised and new media capital may be accumulated. This situation is one of infinite exploitation of the users. The wages paid to users for their surplus value generation equals zero so that the rate of exploitation converges towards infinity. This means that capitalist prosumption is an extreme form of exploitation, in which the prosumers work completely for free.

The fact that surplus value generating labour is an emergent property of capitalist production, means that production and accumulation will break down if this labour is withdrawn. It is an essential part of the capitalist production process. That prosumers conduct surplus-generating labour, can also be seen by imagining what would happen if they would stop using Facebook:

The number of users would drop, advertisers would stop investments because there would be no objects for their advertising messages and therefore no potential customers for their products, the profits of the new media corporations would drop, and they would go bankrupt. If such activities were carried out on a large scale, a new economy crisis would arise. This thought experiment shows that users are essential for generating profit in the new media economy. Furthermore they produce and co-produce parts of the products, and therefore parts of the use value, exchange value, and surplus value that are objectified in these products.

Play Labour: The Structure of Drives of Social Media Prosumption

Capitalism connects labour and play in a destructive dialectic. Traditionally, play in the form of enjoyment, sex, and entertainment was in capitalism only part of spare time, which was unproductive and separate from labour in time. Freud (1961) argued that the structure of drives is characterized by a dialectic of Eros (drive for life, sexuality, lust) and Thanatos (drive for death, destruction, aggression). Humans would strive for the permanent realization of Eros (pleasure principle), but culture would only become possible by a temporal negation and suspension of Eros and the transformation of erotic energy into culture and labour. Labour would be a productive form of desexualization – the repression of sexual drives. Freud speaks in this context of the reality principle or sublimation. The reality principle sublates the pleasure principle; human culture sublates human nature and becomes man's second nature.

Marcuse (1955) connected Freud's theory of drives to Marx's theory of capitalism. He argued that alienated labour, domination, and capital accumulation have turned the reality principle into a repressive reality principle – the performance principle: alienated labour constitutes a surplus-repression of Eros – the repression of the pleasure principle takes on a quantity that exceeds the culturally necessary suppression. Marcuse connected Marx's notions of necessary labour and surplus labour/value to the Freudian drive structure of humans and argued that necessary labour on the level of drives corresponds to necessary suppression and surplus labour to surplus-repression. This means that in order to exist, a society needs a certain amount of necessary labour (measured in hours of work) and hence a certain corresponding amount of suppression of

the pleasure principle (also measured in hours). The exploitation of surplus value (labour that is performed for free and generates profit) would mean not only that workers are forced to work for free for capital to a certain extent, but also that the pleasure principle must be additionally suppressed.

Behind the reality principle lies the fundamental fact of *Ananke* or scarcity (*Lebensnot*), which means that the struggle for existence takes place in a world too poor for the satisfaction of human needs without constant restraint, renunciation, delay. In other words, whatever satisfaction is possible necessitates work, more or less painful arrangements and undertakings for the procurement of the means for satisfying needs. For the duration of work, which occupies practically the entire existence of the mature individual, pleasure is 'suspended' and pain prevails (Marcuse 1955:35).

In societies that are based on the principle of domination, the reality principle takes on the form of the performance principle. Domination "is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged situation" (Marcuse 1955:36). The performance principle is connected to surplus-repression, a term that describes "the restrictions necessitated by social domination" (Marcuse 1955:35). Domination introduces "additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association" (Marcuse 1955:37).

Marcuse (1955) argues that the performance principle means that *Thanatos* governs humans and society and that alienation unleashes aggressive drives within humans (repressive desublimation) that result in an overall violent and aggressive society. Due to the high productivity reached in late-modern society, a historical alternative would be possible: the elimination of the repressive reality principle, the reduction of necessary working time to a minimum and the maximization of free time, an eroticization of society and the body, the shaping of society and humans by *Eros*, the emergence of libidinous social relations. Such a development would be a historical possibility – but one incompatible with capitalism and patriarchy.

Gilles Deleuze (1995) has pointed out that in contemporary capitalism, disciplines are transformed in such a way that humans increasingly discipline themselves without direct external violence. He terms this situation the society of (self-)control. It can for example be observed in the strategies of participatory management. This method promotes the use of incentives and the integration of play into labour. It argues that work should be fun, workers should permanently develop new ideas, realize their creativity, enjoy free time within the factory, etc. The boundaries between work time and spare time, labour and play, become fuzzy. Work tends to acquire qualities of play, and entertainment in spare time tends to become labour-like. Working time and spare time become inseparable. At the same time work-related stress intensifies

and property relations remain unchanged. The exploitation of Internet users by corporate social media is an aspect of this transformation. It signifies that private internet usage, which is motivated by play, entertainment, fun, and joy – aspects of Eros – has become subsumed under capital and has become a sphere of the exploitation of labour. It produces surplus value for capital and is exploited by the latter so that Internet corporations accumulate profit. Play and labour are today indistinguishable. Eros has become fully subsumed under the repressive reality principle. Play is largely commodified, there is no longer free time or spaces that are not exploited by capital. Play is today productive, surplus value generating labour that is exploited by capital. All human activities, and therefore also all play, tends under the contemporary conditions to become subsumed under and exploited by capital. Play as an expression of Eros is thereby destroyed, human freedom and human capacities are crippled. On corporate social media, play and labour converge into play labour that is exploited for capital accumulation. The corporate Internet therefore stands

Table 3. Pleasures in Four Modes of Society (human essence, society with scarcity, classical capitalism, capitalism in the age of corporate social media), Based on a Table from Marcuse 1955:12.

Essence of human desires:	Reality principle in societies with scarcity	Repressive reality principle in classical capitalism	Repressive reality principle in capitalism in the age of corporate social media
immediate satisfaction	delayed satisfaction	delayed satisfaction	Immediate online satisfaction
Pleasure	restraint of pleasure	leisure time: pleasure, work time: restraint of pleasure, surplus repression of pleasure	Collapse of leisure time and work time, leisure time becomes work time and work time becomes leisure time, all time becomes exploited, online leisure time becomes surplus value-generating, wage labour time = surplus repression of pleasure, play labour time = surplus value generating pleasure time
joy (play)	toil (work)	leisure time: joy (play), work time: toil (work)	play labour: joy and play as toil and work, toil and work as joy and play
Receptiveness	productiveness	leisure time: receptiveness, work time: productiveness	Collapse of the distinction between leisure time/work time and receptiveness/productiveness, total commodification of human time
absence of repression of pleasure	repression of pleasure	leisure time: absence of repression of pleasure, work time: repression of pleasure	play labour time: surplus value generation appears to be pleasure-like, but serves the logic of repression (the lack of ownership of capital)

for the total commodification and exploitation of time – all human time tends to become surplus-value generating time that is exploited by capital. Table 3 summarizes the application of Marcuse's theory of play, labour and pleasure to corporate social media.

Conclusion

Corporate social media are not a realm of user/prosumer participation, but a realm of Internet prosumer commodification and exploitation. The exploitation of Internet prosumer labour is one of many tendencies of contemporary capitalism. It is characteristic for a phase of capitalist development, in which the boundaries between play/labour and private/public become blurred.

Given the rise of hyper-neoliberalism as response to the new global capitalist crisis, a shift towards the right and extreme-right in many countries and only slight movements of resistance, I have my doubts that in the contemporary situation of capitalism corporate domination will be successfully resisted. Alternatives are possible, the question is how likely it is that they will be realized.

Four strategies for achieving this goal are 1) the advancement of opt-in online advertising, 2) civil society surveillance of Internet companies, 3) the establishment and support of alternative platforms, and 4) the establishment of an alternative societal context of Internet use.

(1) Opt-in privacy policies

Oscar Gandy (1993) argues that an alternative to opt out solutions of targeted advertising are opt-in solutions that are based on the informed consent of consumers. Opt-in privacy policies are typically favored by consumer and data protectionists, whereas companies and marketing associations prefer opt-out and self-regulation advertising policies in order to maximize profit (Gandy 1993). Socialist privacy legislation could require all commercial Internet platforms to use advertising only as an opt-in option, which would strengthen the users' possibility for self-determination.

Within capitalism, forcing corporations by state laws to implement opt-in mechanisms is certainly desirable, but at the same time it is likely that corporations will not consent to such policies because opt-in is likely to reduce the actual amount of surveilled and commodified user data significantly, which results in a drop of advertising profits. Organizing targeted advertising as opt-in instead of as opt-out or no option does not establish economic user privacy, but is a step towards strengthening the economic privacy of users.

(2) Corporate watch-platforms as a form of struggle against corporate domination

In order to circumvent the large-scale surveillance of consumers, producers, and consumer-producers, movements and protests against economic surveillance are necessary. Kojin Karatani (2005) argues that consumption is the only space in capitalism where workers become subjects that can exert pressure by consumption boycotts on capital. I do not think that this is correct because also strikes show the subject position of workers that enables them to boycott production, to cause financial harm to capital, and to exert pressure in order to voice political demands. However, Karatani in my opinion correctly argues that the role of the consumer has been underestimated in Marxist theory and practice. That in the contemporary media landscape media consumers become media producers who work and create surplus value shows the importance of the role of consumers in contemporary capitalism and of “the transcritical moment where workers and consumers intersect” (Karatani 2005:21). For political strategies this brings up the actuality of an associationist movement that is “a transnational association of consumers/workers” (Karatani 2005:295) that engages in “the class struggle against capitalism” of “workers qua consumers or consumers qua workers” (Karatani 2005:294).

Critical citizens, critical citizens’ initiatives, consumer groups, social movement groups, critical scholars, unions, data protection specialists/groups, consumer protection specialists/groups, critical politicians and critical political parties should observe closely the surveillance and exploitation operations of Internet corporations and document these mechanisms and instances where corporations and politicians take measures that threaten privacy or increase the surveillance of citizens. Such documentation is most effective if it is easily accessible to the public. The Internet provides means for documenting such behaviour.

It can help to watch the watchers and to raise public awareness. In recent years, corporate watch organizations that run online watch platforms have emerged.

Examples of corporate watch organizations are:

CorpWatch Reporting (<http://www.corpwatch.org>),
 Transnationale Ethical Rating (<http://www.transnationale.org>),
 The Corporate Watch Project (<http://www.corporatewatch.org>),
 Multinational Monitor (<http://www.multinationalmonitor.org>),
 crocodyl: Collaborative research on corporations (<http://www.crocodyl.org>),
 Endgame Database of Corporate Fines (<http://www.endgame.org/corpfines.html>),
 Corporate Crime Reporter (<http://www.corporatecrimereporter.com>),
 Corporate Europe Observatory (<http://www.corporateeurope.org>),
 Corporate Critic Database (<http://www.corporatecritic.org>)

Corporate watch platforms on the other hand are attempts by those resisting against asymmetric economic power relations to struggle against the powerful class of corporations by documenting data that should make economic power transparent. Online corporate watchdog organizations document and gather data about the irresponsibility of corporations.

Also WikiLeaks is an online watchdog platform that tries to make power transparent by leaking secret documents about political and economic power. It describes itself as “the first intelligence agency of the people” (WikiLeaks 2010). WikiLeaks mentions as one of its goals to promote “good governance”: “Open government answers injustice rather than causing it. Open government exposes and undoes corruption. Open governance is the most effective method of promoting good governance” (WikiLeaks 2010). The concept of “good governance” has been employed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF 1997) for describing conditions indebted and poor countries have to fulfill in order to get an IMF loan. This circumstance shows that WikiLeaks today has a liberal bias by focusing mainly on making government power visible. It could turn from a predominantly liberal watchdog organization into a socialist watchdog organization if it focused more on making also corporate power transparent.

Watchdog organizations (just like alternative media in general, see Fuchs 2010c, Sandoval and Fuchs 2010) try to exert counter-power. But they are facing resource asymmetries that result in an antagonism between resource precariousness and political autonomy. They are facing three serious limits in capitalism:

- a) They are frequently based on precarious, self-exploitative labour
- b) They often lack all types of resources
- c) Resource provision by politics or the economy may threaten their political autonomy and make them vulnerable to corporate or political filtering of their contents.

(3) Alternative Internet platforms

Another attempt to resist corporate domination of the Internet are non-commercial, non-profit Internet platforms. Wikipedia is the only non-commercial, non-profit Internet platform ranked in the global top 100 of web platforms (data source: alexa.com, accessed on May 25, 2011). It is based on voluntary labour that is not exploited because no economic profit is generated. Wikipedia (and other non-commercial projects) are however vulnerable to capitalist appropriation. If it were transformed into a company, all of the millions of labour hours invested by volunteers were suddenly exploited. This might mean the end of Wikipedia because users have the option to stop contributing to it, but

it would make a few people controlling the Wikimedia Foundation very rich at the expense of the proletarianized Wikipedians.

The most well-known alternative social networking sites project is Diaspora, which tries to develop an open source alternative to Facebook. Diaspora defines itself as “privacy-aware, personally controlled, do-it-all, open source social (<http://www.joindiaspora.com>, accessed on November 11, 2010). It is not funded by advertising, but by donations. The social networking site kaioo is not only non-commercial, it also has terms of use and privacy terms that can be discussed and edited by the users in a wiki.

(4) Alternative societal framework

The contradictions of the corporate Internet can only be resolved in a framework of society that overcomes inequalities. An alternative Internet requires an alternative societal setting: a solidary, co-operative information society – a participatory democracy. Calls for the strengthening of privacy in the light of corporate Internet domination are shortsighted and superficial because privacy is intended to protect humans from harm, not to overcome those conditions and structures that cause harms. Slavoj Žižek (2001:256) suggests in this context not to “retreat into islands of privacy, but an ever stronger socialization of cyberspace” (Žižek 2001:256). Privacy is a contradictory value, it is proclaimed in liberal ideology, but at the same time constantly undermined by corporate and state surveillance. The Swiss Bankers Association sees bank anonymity as a form of “financial privacy” (<http://www.swissbanking.org/en/home/qa-090313.htm>) that needs to be protected and speaks of “privacy in relation to financial income and assets” (<http://www.swissbanking.org/en/home/dossier-bankkundengeheimnis/dossierbankkundengeheimnis-themen-geheimnis.htm>), which shows that privacy can also protect the rich and powerful from public accountability, which can help increasing and legitimatizing inequality. The questions in discussions about privacy should therefore be: Who should be protected by privacy rights in order to be saved from harm? Whose privacy rights should be limited in order not to damage the public good? Privacy contradictions can never be resolved in capitalism. The Swedish socialist philosopher Torbjörn Tännsjö (2010) calls for the establishment of an “open society” that is based on equality and democracy instead of the strengthening of privacy rights. The use of the term “open society” is unfortunate because Karl Popper (1962) employed the same notion for defending the liberal ideology that Tännsjö is criticizing. What Tännsjö actually means by an open society is a participatory democracy.

Questions that remain and are of high political urgency are: How can we achieve a participatory Internet in a participatory democracy and how do we achieve both? How do we avoid a heteronomous information society and create

a participatory information society as context for a participatory Internet? The task for Internet Studies is to overcome its own positivistic mainstream and to focus on the analysis of both alienation and empowerment (Bakardjieva 2011).

Note

1. Sweden is the leading information society according to the ICT Development Index, the Network Readiness Index and the Digital Economy Rankings, see Findahl 2010:11), which is an indication that we should not overstate social media's importance.

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Social Media Platforms as Producers

José van Dijck

Social media platforms have become important technological instruments for the production of sociality, connectivity, and creativity. Although we should not overstate social media's importance, it is safe to say that over the past decade, social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter, user-generated content sites (UGC), for example YouTube and Flickr, and knowledge production sites (KPS) including Google Scholar and Wikipedia, now occupy a considerable part of our communicative and social space. Facebook, for instance, simultaneously constructs and reflects the value of cultivating weak ties and self-expression – a social process that is constantly modulated through this platform. Connectivity has become the material and metaphorical wiring of our culture, a culture where everyone and everything is connected through digital and mostly corporately owned platforms. These platforms appear to accommodate some profound users' needs: the need to be connected to (anonymous) others, the need to be constantly updated on the status of others, the need to build one's presence online, and the need to express oneself creatively and exchange cultural content online. But how are these needs produced?

The thesis I want to defend in this chapter is that the production of sociality, connectivity and creativity should be accredited to a complex amalgam of actors. Most theorists of social media assume producers to be human users or (corporate) owners; the term *produsers* (Bruns 2008) has been coined to indicate the amalgamation of these two. Contrastingly, I advocate a more complex approach to social media which identifies two layers of production, each containing various actors. First, there is the level of politico-legal economy, which includes concepts of ownership and labor, but also involves legal issues about privacy and intellectual property, as well as economic matters concerning business models and governance. This political-legal-economic level is extremely important when analyzing social media's impact on power hierarchies in public communication. The second level is the level of technologically steered socio-cultural interaction. Technology, users, and content are three crucial elements

in the struggle to define power relationships in communication. However directive the hardware and software of social media, human users' interactions with technologies and their expressive contents may be predictable but can also be seditious, which is why we need to closely inspect the interrelations between human and nonhuman actors.

The first layer of relevant actors in the production of sociality will not be included here because it was extensively addressed by Christian Fuchs in the first chapter of this book. In his analysis of social media, Fuchs relates capitalist ownership to labour issues and business models (advertising), translating Marxist concepts of political economy to a Web 2.0 context (Fuchs 2009). In this chapter, I will concentrate on the second layer of the proposed analytical approach, and explore how social media platforms should be considered socio-technical instruments in the construction of sociality, connectivity and creativity. Bruno Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) will be invoked to theorize how social media platforms can be understood as socio-technical ensembles; the last section will also address some critical assessments on the usefulness of this model.

First, I will explain three major actors defining the second layer: *technology*, *users/usage* and *content*. Platforms may enable and constrain users technologically, but users are anything but victims of technology who loyally produce content. As will be elucidated below, the interaction between these actors defines the volatile success of a platform. To illustrate this dynamics, I will analyze relations between technology, users and content in the documentary *Catfish* – a documentary inspired by, and dealing with, digitally mediated communication.

Technology Producing Sociality

What exactly is the role of technology in the production of online sociality, connectivity, and creativity? Three useful concepts to theorize the technological dimension of connectivity are *platform*, *protocol*, and *interface*, precisely because these terms' meanings carry beyond the technological realm into the social and the cultural. Platforms are providers of hardware, software, or services (or combinations thereof) which help code social activities into formatted protocols and present these processes through user-friendly interfaces. For instance, Facebook provides the software interface to channel communicative traffic between people; Flickr codes the social activity of exchanging pictures; E-Bay provides a protocolized environment for selling and buying goods; and JobLink codes professional connections between job seekers and employers. The word "platform" is an inherently ambiguous term, according to Tarlton Gillespie (2010), because it links the computational and the architectural to the social, the political, and the cultural. Web 2.0 platforms, such as YouTube

and Facebook, present themselves as meeting places as well as performative stages: YouTube, for instance, is both a meeting space for videosharing communities and a space to showcase your creative products or, alternately, a site to look at videos posted by others. A platform's architecture – its interface design, code, algorithms, metadata – is always the temporary outcome of its owner's attempt to steer users' activities in a certain direction. For instance, Facebook's interface and protocols push readers towards making connections with unknown people and turning them into "friends" – a concept grounded in the exchange of small talk, self-made content, and informal updates (e.g. Facebook's feature "the Wall").

Any platform's connective structure is mediated by *protocols*: formal descriptions of digital message formats complemented by rules for regulating those messages in or between computing systems. On the one hand, protocols are technical sets of rules which "encapsulate information inside various wrappers, while remaining relatively indifferent to the content of information contained within" (Galloway 2004:52); on the other hand, protocols gain their usability from how they are programmed and how they are governed or "managed" by their owners (ibid. 121). Their logic, then, is determined *through* interfaces and *by* institutions – governmental, communal, or corporate – even if these sites appear to be operated by individual users or user communities. Protocols hide behind simple, user-friendly and often symbolic interface features; the complex technology or "internal interface" is kept hidden from the user who can only see the front end or the "visible interface." A visible interface has technical features (e.g. buttons, scroll bars, stars) and regulatory features (e.g. the rule that a personal profile is required before entering the site) that help steer connections between users and content. The principles behind these algorithms and the connective traffic they regulate remain largely obscure to the ordinary user who likely considers the site to be merely a facilitator of a pre-existing social activity.

However, sociality is increasingly a co-production of humans and machines, with a more prominent, albeit largely hidden, role for technology. David Beer (2009) calls the powerful, oblique information apparatus that comes to produce everyday life the "technological unconscious." He points at the potent, active technological environments that operate "without the knowledge of those upon whom they are taking an effect" (ibid.:990). Algorithms and protocols trigger and channel the visual, auditory, and cultural experiences of people active on social media platforms. Virtually all UGC and SNS platforms rely on protocols that are predicated upon social practices. For instance, while "sharing pictures" sounds like a typical interaction performed by human beings, photo sharing via Flickr is a virtually automated process mediated by sophisticated protocols. Human preferences, tastes, desires, and interests are profoundly maneuvered by the interface features which direct online behaviour, while users' behavioural

metadata in turn help to reconfigure the very algorithms structuring the site. Social metadata, such as tags, comments, friends lists, and groups, are used to personalize media objects and their relations to people and other media objects (Skageby 2009). It is not until the photo or object is tagged or commented upon that relationship intentions become manifest, and yet, these actions are often executed unconsciously.

Platforms, protocols, and interfaces aptly illustrate the convoluted connection between the technological and the social. Social practices are increasingly mediated by platforms that affect people's daily interactions and reciprocal relationships. More precisely, platforms run on account of coded protocols that appear to "mediate" people's social activities, while in fact steering social traffic. Andrew Feenberg (2009) considers Internet technologies not as things but as unfinished processes; as the Internet is still evolving, its owners and users are engaged in constant struggles to define a platform's social meaning. The power to change a platform's interface rests largely with its owners, who also control how much users get to see of the complex automated apparatus hidden behind the screen's features. Langlois *et al.* (2009) rightly point at the potential of users to intervene in the platform's coding strategies at various levels: first, at the level of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) when platform owners allow external developers to use the platform's metadata or code to build applications; and second, at the level of user communities forcing platform owners to explicate social norms behind obscure technological protocols or clarify intentions implicit in interface changes.¹ From the first layer of analysis, the history of Facebook's interface adjustments may be interpreted either as an attempt by engineers and owners to make the platform serviceable to a maximal number of users, or as the corporation's attempt to maneuver its users into commercially exploitable terrain. Deploying the second level of my two-layered analytical prism, the history of Facebook's interface changes illustrates the intense negotiations between platform owners and user groups to divide and conquer specific niches in communication traffic.

While the Internet is still in flux, and social media platforms are being developed to demarcate their specific share of this newly created social space, the subtle and not-so-subtle encounters between the various agents involved in the making of these platforms may appear transient, yet they reflect a power struggle to control the norms for producing sociality. Mapping this process is not as easy as it may seem. Each emerging platform – whether Twitter, Flickr, Google, Facebook, Wikipedia, or their many competitors – tries to conquer and dominate a particular share of the this new communication sphere. The social shaping of technology, as theorized by proponents like Bijker (1995) and Latour (2005), is not just defined by platform owners and engineers; actual and implied users are pivotal agents in the shaping process. By scrutinizing particular platforms, we may learn more about the process of one platform owner

in relation to users and user groups. On an abstract level, though, we may try to identify the principles underpinning the rules for sociality and connectivity. How are connections created, promoted, modulated, and controlled by which algorithms and interfaces? How does interface design consciously play into the “technological unconscious” of users? How is usage inscribed through technology and can users actually influence a platform’s directive interface and protocols?

Users and Usage as Producers of Sociality and Connectivity

Much theory on the production of social media traffic concentrates on the role of the user or groups of users as human agents; in line with actor-network theory, I want to make a distinction between *users* and *usage*. On the one hand, human users are engaged in the social shaping of technology whether or not they comply with the engine’s inscribed use. On the other hand, users and machines mutually affect each other in the technological shaping of sociality: social network sites engineer predetermined sets of categories through which users supposedly build identities and communities (Baym 2010:110). If human reality turns out to deviate from machine-inscribed rules, users may adapt their technical environment to support their social situation. Technology shapes sociality as much as sociality shapes technology – a process in which humans and machines each have their own distinctive but mutually shaping roles.

The study of user agency is quite often restricted to human agents only. Some sociologists and media scholars have investigated the behaviour of actual users to find out how they deploy SNSs to construct individual identities and social circles of networked connections (boyd & Ellison 2007). Along similar lines, communication experts have investigated the way Facebook helps individual users to maintain relations as people move from one place or community to another (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe 2007), while others have examined how teenagers interact with unfamiliar others as they develop their social identities through positioning themselves vis-à-vis their peers (boyd 2008). On a normative level, some specialists have theorized how actual Facebook users interact with each other in order to form groups or communities (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Most of these empirical studies regard human users as autonomous agents and social media platforms as auxiliary means to support online sociality. In this research paradigm, social media platforms serve to connect users at various levels: individuals communicating in private circles, individuals contacting strangers and cultivating weak ties, and individuals forming communities or groups. From an empiricist sociological perspective, human social behaviour is purportedly enhanced by technology, and technology is generally viewed as an *intermediary* between users.

By means of counterpoint, a number of media and communication researchers consider user agency not as an exclusively human activity facilitated by online tools, but as the coalescence of human activity and platform architecture. In her comparative analysis of three SNSs – Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld – Zizi Papacharissi (2009) found that the action radius of individual users in terms of self-presentation and socio-cultural organization is tightly controlled by each site's architecture – that is, by a platform's interface and protocols. Whereas Facebook is the “architectural equivalent of a glass house,” LinkedIn and ASmallWorld have more tightly administered default settings, thus restricting a person's performative space. Papacharissi concludes that technology-as-architecture “communicates the inherent promise and predisposition of online spaces” (ibid.:216). From a similar point of view, David Beer (2009:998) stresses that user's agency is a driving force of each platform's “performative infrastructure.” People express their tastes and preferences, while algorithms translate them into relational databases which, in turn, inform user behavior. This does not mean that human agents are taken hostage by a platform's architecture; users are not uniform groups which are either empowered or exploited by social media apparatuses. On the contrary, users may shape their profiles and behavior so as to anticipate the effects of certain acts and steer things into a direction they deem more desirable. Human and technical agents, rather than being hierarchically ordered entities, are mutually intertwined in determining a platform's *usage*.

Cultural theorists, for their part, also show a tendency to interpret user agency exclusively in terms of human activity when they talk about social media embodying “participatory culture.” The “active participant,” cast ideally as someone who is well-versed in the skills of new media, serves to contrast the idea of a “passive consumer” of old media. Henry Jenkins (2006:24), for instance, applauds active users as the defining feature of what he calls participatory culture: “Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participate within culture.” Jenkins, along with Mark Deuze (2007), hails the technological opportunities seized by grassroots movements and individuals to express their creativity and provide a diverse palette of voices. However, social media sites do not automatically turn all users into active participants. In fact, the term “user” rather than older and familiar terms like “audience,” “viewer,” or “customer” conceals the fact that the large majority of users are anything but active participants. As evidenced by various surveys, user agency comprises different levels of participation, varying from creators and spectators to inactives or “lurkers” (Li 2007; van Dijck 2009). More significantly, the concept of active users seems to be invented by media producers as a tool for expansion (Schanke & Ytreberg 2009). Media industries often adopt the term to emphasize user empowerment while downplaying user exploitation,

as will be powerfully argued by Christian Fuchs in the previous chapter. Users are invited as “participants” while platform interfaces effectively hide the fact that *all* user activity, whether active posting or passive viewing of content, contribute to a site’s economic value. The number of connections users make through a platform determines a platform’s monetary value, so that is why a site’s architecture pushes users to constantly connect to others, to click through and to promote the formation of new groups and communities (Dean 2010).

Inadvertently, social media are thus viewed as tools for community formation: online communities strengthen offline ties established in real life, and Web 2.0 platforms are thus seen as facilitators of both offline and virtual communities. What is casually called community formation, though, is often a product of both human collectivity and, even more so, of technical connectivity. Sites like Facebook direct their users towards sharing their posts with as many people as possible and actively encourage individuals to join groups, based on an automatic detection of shared taste or contacts. Profiles of members that show vague connections are automatically invited to join the group. Terms like “community” and “communality” have become inflated notions as more networks of strangers start calling every invitee a friend and every clicker a follower. On a more abstract level, platforms are regarded as potent instruments for enhancing citizenship and collective engagement (Jenkins 2006; Benkler 2006; Shirky 2008). Frequently used notions like “collective intelligence” and “collective memory,” though, appear to overstate the impact of human agents in developing user agency, while understating the influence of technological and commercial agents. For one thing, technical affordances inscribed in two different platform architectures may create quite different bases for identity and group formation (Haythornwaite & Kendall 2010). If one platform strictly prohibits the use of fake names or anonymous identities while another site encourages the use of aliases and multiple identities, the resulting notions of community and engagement will be quite different. *Mutatis mutandis*, commercial motives for bringing people together, such as Britney Spears’ Twitter page or CNN’s Facebook page, result in quite different “communities” of followers and fans. The connotation of community, in other words, has been transferred from a context of human sociality to a context of engineered sociality while keeping its human-centric meaning, even though technology is a major factor in defining sociality.

In sum, user agency is a complex concept, involving both human and technical agents as well as institutional and societal agents steering user activities. Therefore, user agency can hardly be assessed from a mono-disciplinary angle, as technological, social, and cultural aspects of SNS and UGC sites are inextricably intertwined. This approach to user agency should yield a model that accounts for users’ multiple roles, while concurrently accounting for technologies and site operators-owners as actors who direct usage. In the last section,

I will return to such a theoretical model, but first we need to account for one more important aspect of social media: its (cultural) content.

Producing and Controlling Content

Social media platforms are often seen as a neutral intermediary, and platform owners are commonly regarded as producers and distributors of communicative messages or cultural content generated by users. In a technological sense, connectivity is about the quality of *connections*, rather than about the nature or quality of content. Quality of content is inherently part of a platform's concern: if the wires get clogged with sexually explicit messages or spam, the site will quickly become unfit to the purposes it was designed for. Protocols – both technical and regulatory – are thus put in place to keep platforms clean from polluting traffic. This is, for instance, the reason why Facebook sustains its “real name” policy: every user has to register under his or her own name and violators will be refused further access to the site. Evidently, the quality of connections between users and content cannot be guaranteed, and platform owners have the power to regulate what content is allowed and how connections are steered. Cultural or national differences may lead to local adjustments of interface features or user policies. For instance, YouTube not only deploys algorithmic spiders to detect forbidden content but also keeps up a system of human vigilance to filter out inappropriate messages. Norms with regard to what counts as appropriate content, e.g. forms of sexuality or religious expression, are very much culturally defined, which is why most platforms deploy national filters. These filters of course can also be imposed on platforms by national governments, as illustrated in China and Iran, forcing a platform owner to either censor a site's content or modulate its protocols (Morozov 2011). Even when for instance human rights activists have warned Facebook that their real-name policy may endanger people's lives in countries where police or militias closely monitor citizens, they vowed not to change it. The nature and quality of content – whether communicative traffic or creative content – is thus controlled by platform owners, allegedly to guarantee “good connectivity” to its users.

The interest of platform owners to promise good connectivity ideally converges with the interest of users to generate and distribute (good) content. In reality, their interests also widely diverge. When the term “user-generated content” first emerged, it suggested that most platforms were about creative content garnered from a collective of users who would and could manage themselves online with the help of software. That is why UGC-platforms, when they first evolved between 2000 and 2005, were generally welcomed as vehicles for participatory culture driven by an ideology of users collaborating

to pursue common goals of expansive *creativity*, whereas social network sites thrived on the ideals of expansive sociability (van Dijck & Nieborg, 2009). Yet as user bases of these new media channels grew exponentially, notably after 2005, professional organizers and entrepreneurs taking over community platforms were less interested in generating creative content than in utilizing the sites' potential as connective resources. For instance, when Google took over YouTube, in 2006, it never aimed at making a profit on the exchange of home videos; instead, Google was predominantly interested in YouTube's (meta-)data revealing patterns of users' interests and behavior, in order to connect these patterns to other Google databases and sell relevant information and space to advertisers. Put differently: rather than being after co-creating content with its users, Google has always been keenly interested in people using cultural content or personal expression as vehicles for making connections.

More than anything, cultural content – whether text, music, or videos – draws out opinions on what people like or dislike, what they covet or loathe, what interests them and what does not. Personal and creative expressions exposing people's inner drives and unconscious desires are hardly isolated articulations, as they are commonly deployed to harness bonds and discover group affiliations. Patterns connecting expressive content and taste evaluations structure social media platforms' logic, as these expressions help optimize a platform's connective functionality. Such patterns not only reflect common tastes and shared preferences for content; users are actively directed towards content they might also like, based on their previously divulged interests. Just as Amazon.com has become better than your best friend in predicting your interests in books and music, algorithms suggesting which friends will suit you based on communal taste and preferences have now become a common denominator buttressing social media's automated engines. In the huge maze of videos uploaded on YouTube, users are guided to content by the algorithms and protocols hiding behind the site's visible interface features: buttons to view “most popular” videos, buttons to choose content categories, and “like” buttons to express one's fondness. Preferences for certain music, videos or texts literally connect individuals to content, individuals to groups, and content to groups. As more and more people chat in real time about their favorite TV-shows on Facebook and Twitter, television networks are trying to figure out how to capitalize on users' inclination to share their views online in real time and how to connect them to advertiser's interests. Connectivity thrives by the instruments of measuring personalized taste and aggregated preferences.

Social media platforms are thus intricate convolutions of technology, user practice, *and* cultural content built around the people's various needs in terms of communication and information. Since these platforms increasingly pervade our everyday social practices and shape cultural content, we have more than one reason to examine them as socio-technical manifestations of sociality,

connectivity, and creativity. Humans are not exclusive creators of content. Automated bots are increasingly deployed in sites like Wikipedia to generate content culled from government databases (Niederer & van Dijck 2010). This “technicity” of content, in particular, is difficult to comprehend if you have little access to the invisible interfaces behind a site’s observable features. Content is never simply “there,” created voluntarily by active human users; content is generated, triggered, expanded, and controlled by collaborating humans and machines, consciously and unconsciously. For this reason, the question arises how we can understand systems whose constitutive code is virtually closed off from public scrutiny and second, how code connects users to content in ways that remain imperceptible to outsiders. Or, as Langlois *et al.* (2009: np) phrase it poignantly: “How can we understand, map and otherwise critique emergent forms of connectivity and articulation among Web 2.0 sites, users and content, especially when the architecture and technical processes shaping communicational dynamics are black-boxed, opaque and secretive?” According to Langlois *et al.*, this is not only a technological challenge, but also “an invitation to reassess the shaping of power dynamics in online spaces.” Before addressing the question of how to meet this challenge methodologically, I will first apply the concepts used in the previous sections to analyze the various actors involved in platform production in the “social media” documentary *Catfish*.

Illustrating the Analytical Prism: *Catfish*

When the documentary *Catfish* (Henry Joost & Ariel Schulman, 2010) hit the art movie scene, just a few weeks before the Hollywood production *The Social Network* was released, it was quickly labeled “the real Facebook movie.”² The documentary relates how 23-year-old New York photographer Nev Schulman becomes friends on Facebook with Abby Pierce, an eight-year-old fan from rural Michigan. They start corresponding after Abby sends him a painting of one of his photographs. Nev quickly becomes part of Abby’s Facebook circle, which includes Abby’s mother Angela, some twenty friends, and Abby’s 19-year-old half-sister Megan, an attractive looking girl who is a singer-songwriter. Nev starts a romantic long-distance relationship with Megan, who sends him MP3 files of her songs, and he gradually becomes a virtual member of the Pierce-Facebook-family. After phone calls and SMS contact, Nev and Megan are planning to meet in person, when Nev discovers on YouTube that the songs Megan has send him are performed by other people. Nev’s brother Ariel and his friend Henry, who have started filming his escapades with a handheld camera and mobile phones, persuade Nev to continue the romantic affair after he finds out that Abby and Megan have posted several deceptive claims. When the three young men travel to Michigan together to pay an unannounced visit to their Facebook

friends, it quickly turns out that Abby's mother Angela made all the paintings Nev received. It takes some time for Angela to confess, in front of the camera, that she also invented and impersonated the lovely Megan in phone calls and short messages; she stole the photograph from a Canadian young woman on Facebook.³ In real life, Angela is a middle-aged housewife who cares for her husband and two seriously disabled stepsons. The trio documents Angela's apologetic explanation of how she manufactured a complete Facebook reality – including twenty friends' profiles and several mobile phone connections – to help her escape from her disappointing real life situation.

Catfish offers a prism to analyse how social media platforms are active producers of connectivity, sociality and creativity. First, the documentary explores how social media platforms are technological instruments that mediate human agency. Second, it features actual Facebook users cast in their respective roles as compliant content generators and subversive users who initiate connections and sustain connectivity. Third, the film elucidates how platforms are not simply containers filled by users, but that cultural content is a crucial actor in social communication.

From a technological perspective, *Catfish* could be considered the product of a user generated content (UGC) praxis – a mediated praxis where every creative amateur can create cultural content with the help of ubiquitously available, easy-to-use equipment. The hardware involved in making this documentary consisted of a camcorder, a laptop, several mobile phones, and a few microphones. The three young men use these tools to assemble all footage necessary to make a 90-minute documentary, to rely on professional editing tools only in the film's final production stage. When Angela admits her piteous Facebook-fabrication, she displays particular pride in explaining her technological ingenuity when she shows how she used cut-and-paste skills to fool everyone. The woman uses Facebook to create and fake content, to make and forge connections. Angela cultivates sociality at the same time and by the same means as she creates connections and creative products. By aggrandizing her presence online she builds her own circle of "siblings" and "friends" – a world in which she feels appreciated and loved and which she controls with her technological ingenuity like a twenty-first century Wizard of Oz.

We may regard the protagonists of *Catfish* as actual Facebook users. Both Nev Schulman and Angela Pierce used the site as a means to contact unknown strangers and turn them into "friends", a usage that is very much inscribed in the site's interface and protocols. Nev deployed the social network site the way it is intended to be used; he relied on its technological and social presumptions and complied with the site's protocols, such as its "real name policy" which is part of Facebook's user guidelines.⁴ Angela, contrastingly, violated Facebook's policy and not only fabricated her identity but also undermined the site's directive usage rules by stealing profiles and photographs from other

members. Facebook's system for recognizing authentic profiles is obviously far from perfect if ordinary users like Angela can subvert Facebook's automatic detection engines and undermine their coercive protocols. By the same token, Angela created not only a fake identity but also a fake community, cutting and pasting together a circle of friends. Nev thus involuntary became part of an imagined community that sprouted from Angela's imagination. For Nev's part, he refused to "de-friend" Angela after finding out about her fraud, but listed her as his friend after she confessed and made amends by posting her art on Facebook under her real name and picture. From this example we learn that *usage* is not the same as *users*, but that both intended and subversive uses are defining factors in the shaping of sociality and connectivity.

Finally, in the specific case of *Catfish*, we may notice the importance of cultural content as a constitutive factor in the production of connected sociality. Not coincidentally, Nev Schulman was lured by "little Abby's" artwork as well as by the creative products of "singer-songwriter" Megan. Common taste and shared aesthetic preferences constitute the heart of social media, as human-made contacts are likely to be based in communal predilections. The (fake) Facebook family created by Angela revolved around a shared preference for cultural objects (paintings, music, photographs). Ironically, Nev's discovery of Angela's counterfeit was triggered by Facebook's automated ability to match musical and lyrical similarities, which is how he found out that Megan could not be the original source of the songs sent to him. Creative expressions are coded and distributed by platforms, where they can be ripped and remixed infinitely, inducing plagiarism and imitation. However, the same tools may be deployed to detect original sources and to unravel patterns undetectable to the human ear or eye.

Technology, users/usage, and content, in other words, are intricately intertwined in the production of social contacts and engineered connections. It is important, though, to distinguish these separate actors in order to understand the complex dynamics of social media. *Catfish*, itself a product of social media, is ultimately turned into a feature film which subsequently becomes part of the (alternative) media distribution system. After winning the Sundance festival, it was distributed through film houses and on DVD.

Actor-network Theory: Advantages and Drawbacks

As far as the socio-technological-cultural level of analysis is concerned, it is illuminating to look at one specific example that clarifies some of the principles underpinning the socio-technical structure of social media. Over the past five years, social media platforms may have been overstudied in terms of their specific manifestations and understudied in terms of their (common) structuring

principles. Several scholars have focused on specific social media platforms to examine their technological architecture, to analyse their users' behaviour, to categorize and describe its content, or to explicate their business models (Burgess & Green 2009; Snickars & Vonderau 2009). The approach of singling out one aspect of social media – be it user behaviour, economics, or content evaluation – or one platform – YouTube, Facebook, Google – is highly valuable when it comes to grasping the complex interrelation of all factors constituting such platforms both as objects and as processes. Deconstructing social media platforms to allow a detailed exegesis of their constituting parts may yield insight into the culture in which they thrive. However, we need to also look beyond individual platforms, approaching them as dynamic structures which evolve in close connection to each other and to culture at large.

The question arises whether we could ground the proposed level of socio-technical analysis in a theoretical model that allows us to deconstruct emergent social media platforms in their various manifestations. Notions of sociality and connectivity are naturally related to, and arguably rooted in, the concept of networks. Networks are both infrastructural and social organizations – systems of technologies and people – made up of “ties” and “nodes” which render them conduits for connectivity. As stated above, I do not subscribe to an approach of social media as intermediaries of social action; platforms such as Facebook are not transmitters but rather producers of sociality, enabling connections as well as forging them. Platforms are therefore socio-technical and cultural-ideological constructs, which are built to create a new type of social capital: connectivity. An approach that departs from the notion of networks as socio-technical ensembles is Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT). Counted as a special branch of social constructivism, ANT does not intend to examine “the social” as such, but aims to map relations between technologies and people, and tries to explain how these relations are both material and semiotic. Social media platforms, in Latour's vocabulary, would not be intermediaries which simply transport forces without transforming them; they are *mediators* that translate meaning and transform the elements they are supposed to carry (Latour 2005:108). Networks, as performative infrastructures, and actors – both human and nonhuman – are thus inextricably intertwined in the shaping of interactive processes.

Why is ANT potentially helpful in elucidating the principles of social media platforms as producers of sociality and connectivity? For one thing, ANT focuses on *agency* – agency that is variable and changes depending on what it is used *for*. As explained in the previous sections of this chapter, social media platforms introduce new types of agency in online communities which help shape the technologically inscribed social norms for interaction and communication in the connective sphere, and vice versa, platform owners deploy agency to calibrate technological architecture and interface design, for instance to accommodate advertisers. According to ANT principles, the study of social media platforms

prompts questions such as: “Which agencies are invoked? Which figurations are they endowed with? Through which modes of action are they engaged? Are we talking about causes and their intermediaries or about a concatenation of mediators?” (Latour 2005:62). People have agency, but objects have agency too: nonhuman elements, like algorithms, affect how people act and how their actions are controlled. Another important reason why ANT is helpful, is through its focus on technologies as *processes*: a technology never simply *is*, but is part of a larger evolving scheme of invention, development, acceptance, implementation, resistance, and rejection – in short, a process of constant reconfiguration. This process, according to social constructivists, is characterized by contingency and “interpretative flexibility.” The Internet, as the larger technological infrastructure on which social media platforms are built, is still very much in flux, and few, if any, platforms have attained a stabilized meaning or standardized use (Feenberg 2009). Various modalities of communication introduced in the 1990s (e-mail, listservs, blogs), are now modified or even replaced as a result of the emergence of social media – a process that is still ongoing.

Still, actor-network theory has also drawn criticism in terms of its usefulness for analysing *digital* networks. For example, ANT is said to overemphasize the relation between human and non-human forms of agency, while the complexity of Web 2.0 platforms forces its analysts to move beyond this binary configuration (Rossiter & Lovink 2010). Although I agree that there might be too much weight on the human versus nonhuman actor in ANT, this criticism ignores the fact that ANT is explicitly levelled at the fluid relationships between humans, technologies, and ideas, as explained by Latour.⁵ However, there are two more profound drawbacks to using ANT as a theoretical basis for my analytical prism. First, ANT is strong in that it acknowledges the interwovenness of technology and its users/usage, but it generally disregards cultural aspects of content and form. If we want to analyse the social construction of social media platforms, we cannot discount the cultural forms and contents they produce, as these are in integral part of the shaping of technology and sociality. ANT appears to be open enough as a theory to include cultural forms and content as an actor in the process of shaping sociality, connectivity and creativity, so it is relatively easy to take it into consideration when analysing a particular platform. Second, ANT hardly accounts for pre-existing power structures, but only regards these structures when emerging from activity within the network. As stated before, it is impossible to disregard existing power relations through which new platforms emerge, and neither can we ignore the economic and legal matrix from which they arise – even if their emergence affects these larger schemes by changing their very conditions. Besides revamped concepts of political economy based on Marxist theory, as will be discussed in the previous chapter by Christian Fuchs, Manuel Castells (2009) political economy of networks approach could constitute a necessary complement to the larger implications of evolving social media.

Conclusion

We still know very little about the “codes” underlying digitized processes of sociality and connectivity. Understandably, we tend to concentrate first on specific manifestations (platforms) or their specific aspects (users or content). The larger culture in which these platforms arise espouses a particular logic – a logic rooted in social needs and cultural norms – and supports technological systems striving to infiltrate practical social routines, so these routines become ensconced in economic models and legal schemes. Arguing from an expansive actor-network approach, Facebook is not a product, but a constantly evolving process whose changing manifestation is the result of a negotiation between owners, users, content producers, lawmakers, engineers, and marketers about the control of data and technology. Actor-network-theory partially supports the multi-faceted analytical framework needed to better comprehend this connected, networked culture. Although ANT does not fully cover the cultural dimensions and economic-political implications of social media in an emerging culture of connectivity, it offers a strong basis from which to elaborate a more comprehensive analytical frame.

So what happens to the notion of “producer” in the context of social media platforms? And how can researchers adapt their analytical frameworks accordingly? First, the producer of social media is no longer a singular entity, but is distributed among various levels: technology, users, content, as well as owners, business and governance models. Production is still a relevant notion, though, and it is important to trace how platforms construct various forms of networked sociality. However, any attempt to reduce this notion to one specific human actor (owners, users, or engineers) or to a hybrid kind of human actor (produsage as the hybrid manifestation of users and producers) fails to acknowledge the impact of nonhuman actors, whether technology, political economy or regulatory structures. Therefore, I have proposed in this chapter a model for understanding production as a distributed, dispersed notion in the context of social media. In addition, it would be a mistake to regard platforms like Facebook as a finished product. They are rather processes (or services) that are never finished; their endless, evolving dynamics – always adapting the platform to new challenges, whether posed by users or other platforms – are indeed inherently part of the production process.

Researchers studying the phenomenon of social media platforms can thus no longer afford to focus on production from a singular discipline. We can hardly understand changes in a website’s interface or coded architecture without scrutinizing its user interaction; and it is problematic to examine user interaction without inspecting the content or governance structure of a site. The two-layered, multi-faceted model I have proposed in this chapter inevitably combines insights from at least five disciplinary angles: technology studies,

social science, humanities, economics, and law. Interdisciplinarity is not a goal in itself but a necessity: we need to connect various disciplinary angles to open up a panoramic view onto social media. Platforms owners and developers have long discovered the importance of having software designers work with expert users, of letting engineers collaborate with MBAs and creative artists with legal experts. Researchers are lagging behind in widening their scope. Unfamiliarity with each other's paradigm may never be an excuse for researchers to avoid boundary crossing. In order to fully grasp the production of social media and their implications, the analytical focus needs to be comprehensive, critical, and engaged.

Notes

1. When Facebook, in 2007, inserted the Beacon function into its interface – a function allowing commercial websites to track the purchases of Facebook members on certain sites – fierce protests from active users forced Facebook to turn the feature off (Cohen 2008). The introduction of the Newsfeed feature in Facebook's interface, also in 2007, can be considered both a response to advertiser's demands as well as a commercial response to Twitter's success as a microblogging service.
2. The documentary *Catfish* was directed by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman and produced by Andrew Jarecki, who previously produced *Capturing the Friedmans*, another documentary made out of home movie and video fragments. *Catfish* won the 2010 Sundance Festival and was released in American movie theatres September 17, 2010.
3. Stealing photographs and identity information from Facebook is very easy, despite Facebook's "stringent policies." In February 2011, artists Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico mined photographs of 250,000 Facebook users for their art project *Lovely Faces* in order to create the same number of fake profiles on their own "dating site." The Facebook company was not amused and accused the artists of privacy invasion and identity theft. See: *Lovely Faces Increases Facebook Privacy Fears* <http://www.suite101.com/content/lovely-faces-increases-facebook-privacy-fears-a344731#ixzz1Dknsna1D>
4. In order to sign up for Facebook, you must provide your real first name and last name; it is a violation of Facebook policy to maintain more than one account on the site. Nancy K. Baym (2010: 110), quoting Gross and Acquisti (2005) observes that 89 % of all Facebook users appeared to be real; other sources put subversion of Facebook's real-name policy at 20 %.
5. About the fluidity of the (human/nonhuman) actor, Latour (1998) explains: "There is no model of (human) actor in ANT nor any basic list of competences that have to be set at the beginning because the human, the self and the social actor of traditional social theory is not on its agenda. So what is on its agenda? The attribution of human, unhuman, nonhuman, inhuman, characteristics; the distribution of properties among these entities; the connections established between them; the circulation entailed by these attributions, distributions and connections; the transformation of those attributions, distributions and connections, of the many elements that circulates and of the few ways through which they are sent." It is exactly this notion of fluidity between various actors that I am looking for in defining the social production of sociality and connectivity.

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The Participatory Organization

Alternative Models for Organizational Structure and Leadership

Nico Carpentier

What Chantal Mouffe (2000:1-2) has called the “democratic revolution”, initiated more than 200 years, has not remained limited to institutionalized politics, but has been extended to a variety of societal spheres. In the media sphere, three overlapping stages of democratization can be distinguished. The rise of community and alternative media, already several decades ago, marked a first important moment in the democratization of our Western media worlds (see Janowitz (1967) for an early publication on the community press, more recent examples are Fraser and Restrepo (2000), Downing *et al.* (2000), Rodriguez (2001), Gumucio (2001), Atton (2002), Howley (2005) and Bailey *et al.* (2008)). In a second stage, we saw the popularization of a tuned-down version of participation within the mainstream media sphere, when genres like the talk show (and the subgenre of the audience discussion programme) (Carbaugh 1988; White 1992; Munson 1993; Livingstone and Lunt 1996; Leurdijk 1999) and reality-television (Kilborn 1994; Andrejevic 2004; Biressi & Nunn 2005; Hill 2007) obtained a strong foothold in the (mainstream) media landscape. The third stage of democratization is (even) more recent, and coincides with the development and growth of the internet. Especially the shift to web 2.0 allowed for a strong increase of ordinary people’s participation in the realm of media production (see Ferdinand 2000; Hacker & van Dijk 2000; Browning 2002; Chadwick 2006; Dahlberg & Siapera 2007; Cammaerts 2008; Coleman & Blumler 2009).

In evaluating these different stages of media democratization, one should be careful not to enter into a too celebratory mood blinding us for the many problems that characterize each of these three stages. Moreover, although the different stages overlap (community and alternative media have for instance not disappeared in the 21st century), they are also characterized by specific articulations and practices, which privilege some aspects over others. This has also caused some key components to lose their prominence (or dominance). In this article, I want to focus on one concept, the notion of organization (and

its tracks, leadership), which has arguably gone through such a change and fell from discursive grace in the third stage of democratization in the media sphere.

The concept of organization of course still plays a significant role in capturing the social structures through which (mainstream) media activities are deployed, and it has a structural impact on the articulation of leadership. It is considered to be stating the obvious to say that small- and large-sized media organizations are ubiquitous within the media sphere. Within the mainstream media sphere, these organizations are predominantly characterized by leadership models that are built on vertical hierarchies that structure their organizational-internal worlds, while the relations with the organizational-external worlds do not allow for much proximity, let alone participation (with some exceptions when it comes to participatory spaces opened up by specific genres). It thus comes as no surprise that new media theories have applauded the opportunities offered by the online to bypass the processes of commodification, hierarchization and instrumentalization that are very much part of the world of mainstream media organizations. This has also caused new media theory to shift away from the concept of the organization itself, and to celebrate instead the online activities of communities as symbols of democratization and participation. They are seen as sites of resistance against the workings of (mainstream) media organizations, which have become articulated as undemocratic constitutive outsides.

This theoretical chapter, grounded in democratic-participatory theory and organizational sociology – with a flavour of post-structuralist theory added to it – wants to revisit the first stage of democratization in the media sphere and highlight another, older, contestation of the mainstream media organizational model. This contestation placed significant emphasis on the notion of the organization, while articulating its internal and external functioning with a strong notion of democracy. Particularly, alternative and community media theory (and praxis) provides us with an alternative model of organization, containing different articulations of two notions (leadership and participation) that are intrinsically linked to the functioning of any social structure. In other words, the concept of the alternative media organization implies a re-articulation of the mainstream media organization, and its hierarchical and exclusionary ways of functioning. Although often forgotten by new media theory, or articulated as the “prehistory” of contemporary participatory culture – as Jenkins (2006:231) for instance does – alternative and community media provide us with a theoretical and practical toolkit to consider and revalidate the importance of the notion of organization for more maximalist participatory-democratic practices. Supported by a rudimentary two-dimensional model (where the internal/external is combined with the material/discursive) this chapter will more particularly attempt to show the importance of the participatory organization, besides many other forms that structure the social, for the continued democratization of our democracies.

The Organization Concept: Towards a Two-dimensional Model

Media organizations are seen here as interconnections of the material and the discursive, and arrange and regulate specific people and objects within the organization, creating an internal hierarchy, and a border between them and their outsides, while at the same time establishing material links with their political, economic, technological and cultural environments. Moreover, organizational cultures attribute roles and identities to these people and objects, discursively structuring their practices, positions and hierarchies. Media organizations work also as discursive machineries that generate media output (in combination with a variety of other texts, such as for instance technical manuals and annual reports) and produce discourses on all possible societal fields (including the media sphere itself).

There is a wide variety of definitions of the concept of organization, but as Lammers (1987:22) remarks, there is consensus on a number of key characteristics. Lammers (1987:29) describes the organization as a social structure that has been consciously constructed and is (more or less) regularly reconstructed. Organizations have a formally defined design which is intended to be rational and is characterized by functionalization, coordination and finalization. Within the organization, tasks are defined and grouped together (functionalization); these tasks are then combined (coordination) with the aim of achieving the general objective(s) (finalization), which can range from utilitarian to normative (Etzioni 1961). A short definition that emphasizes this aspect can be found in Etzioni (1964:3): "Organizations are social units (or human groupings) deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals". Through these logics, hierarchies and power imbalances become embedded within the organization, as described in Stinchcombe's (1967:155) definition: "Any social arrangement in which the activities of some people are systematically planned by other people (who, therefore, have authority over them) in order to achieve some special purpose is called a formal organization". One concept that is often used to capture these power differences within organizations is the notion of leadership, defined as "the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (House *et al.* 2004:15, quoted in Bass and Bass 2008:23).

These definitions are not meant to create the impression that all organizations are similar. As in many fields of the social, there is a wide variety of organizational structures, practices and cultures. Attempts to deal with this complexity have resulted in a series of categorizing systems, among which the distinction between the mechanistic, organic and bureaucratic organization is one of the most prominent. Hatch (1997) uses three characteristics, complexity, formalization and centralization, to support this typology. Whereas organic

organizations have low levels of complexity, formalization and centralization, mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations have high levels of complexity and formalization. The distinction between mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations is that the former is characterized by high levels of centralization, while bureaucracies – though highly formalized – function in a decentralized way. Not surprisingly, Hatch (1997) refers here to the work of Weber (1947). Also related to this typology is the debate on the role of institutionalization, or the way that organizations become “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1957:17). As Scott (1992) argues, institutionalization implies that the organization is embedded in an environment with specific expectations of the organization, and imposes rules in order to ensure the organization’s social legitimacy.

Despite the diversity that characterizes the world of organizations, these social structures have a common focus on the realization of a specific set of objectives. In order to achieve this aim, the people and objects that are constructed as internal to the organization are arranged in a specific (hierarchical-formalized) order. As Picard and van Weezel (2008:23) put it: “The organizational forms of businesses allow enterprises to enter structured relations with owners of capital, workers, and suppliers, and to provide facilities and equipment and management necessary to effectively produce and distribute products and services.” Through these logics, but in a variety of ways, people become members (and leaders or followers – see Heller and van Til 1982:405) and objects become owned. Keeping in mind Rafaeli’s (1997) argument, we should not lose sight of the complexities of membership because membership might be based on physical or temporal relationships, production relationships or cultural relationships. A similar argument can be raised for notions of leadership (and followership) (Bryman 1999; Bass & Bass 2008). And, as Pels (1998) argues, the notions of ownership and owner are not always straightforward either.

These internal-material characteristics (see Figure 1) are first of all complemented by external-material characteristics, which position the organization within a network of other organizations and within the context of what is often called the organizational environment. This network can be extended to include the circulating objects that leave or enter the organization. Although the internal logics of organizations should not necessarily be articulated as stable, especially the relations of organizations with their environments and the constant flux of people and objects that move across their boundaries show the structural instability and contingency of organizations.

From this perspective, organizations can be seen as attempts to delineate a unity and to protect its stability, through the logics of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization, while simultaneously being exposed to centrifugal and centripetal forces. Also, at this level, organizations cannot be seen as homogenous; they react differently when confronted with

Figure 1. Organizational Characteristics: A Two-dimensional Model

	Material	Discursive
Internal	Hierarchical-formalized and objective-oriented arrangement of people and objects	Organizational culture Discursive machinery
External	Interorganizational network, organizational environment and circulating objects	

the complexity of environmental relationships. Just as the differences between mechanistic and organic organizations (from an internal-material approach) have been theorized, we can argue also that there are mechanic and organic networks in which organizations are situated. Here, differences arise from the more rigid or more fluid articulations of the different actors that constitute these networks.

One way to capture the (differences in) organizational, interorganizational and environmental fluidity is through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of the rhizome. This metaphor is based on the juxtaposition of rhizomatic and arbolescent thinking. The structures of mechanistic and bureaucratic organizations, and the networks in which they are situated, can be seen as arbolescent. The arbolescent is a structure that is linear, hierarchic and sedentary, and can be represented as "the tree-like structure of genealogy, branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories" (Wray 1998:3). According to Deleuze and Guattari, it is the philosophy of the State. The rhizomatic, on the other hand, links to organic organizations and their networks. The rhizomatic is non-linear, anarchic and nomadic: "Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:19). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) enumerate a series of characteristics of the rhizome – the principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. Connection and heterogeneity imply that any point of the network can be connected to any other point, despite the different characteristics of the components. The concept of multiplicity constructs the rhizome, not on the basis of elements that are each operating within fixed sets of rules, but as an entity whose rules are constantly in motion because new elements are always included. The principle of the asignifying rupture means that "a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:9). Finally, the principle of the map is juxtaposed with the idea of the copy. In contrast to the copy, the map is:

open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:12).

Apart from the more material characteristics of organizations, their discursive characteristics can be emphasized also, without aiming to disconnect the discursive from the material. At the internal-discursive level, organizations are sites where organizational culture develops, circulates and is preserved. Siehl and Martin (1984:227) describe organizational culture as follows: “organizational culture can be thought of as the glue that holds an organization together through a sharing of patterns of meaning. The culture focuses on the values, beliefs, and expectations that members come to share”. As Martin (2002:3) remarks, the field of organizational culture is broad, and, for instance, includes “the stories people tell to newcomers to explain ‘how things are done around here’, the ways in which offices are arranged and personal items are or are not displayed, jokes people tell, the working atmosphere [...], the relations among people [...], and so on”. Organizational culture, or “the way of life in an organization” (Hatch 1997:204), produces discourses on (amongst many other areas) the general objectives and specific tasks of the organization, the means and decision-making procedures that need to be used to achieve them, the language and conceptual framework, the membership boundaries and criteria for inclusion (and exclusion), and the criteria for allocation of status, power and authority, and rewards and punishments (based on Schein (1985), see also the summary by Hatch (1997:213)). At the same time, we should keep in mind that organizational culture is not homogeneous, and the above-mentioned areas provide ample opportunity for conflict, contestation and power struggles within the organization.

Again, organizational culture does not stop at the borders of the organization (however permeable these borders might be). Organizational identities and discourses interact with the networks, environments and cultures in which the organizations are embedded. These outsides offer to organizations fields of discursivities that provide the discursive elements to construct the organizational cultures. Obviously, discourses on “good” decision-making, leadership, followership and membership, and on the legitimacy of the organizational objectives, are not continuously reinvented by each individual organization, but they are part of a broader cultural configuration that seeps into these organizations. Organizations, at the same time, are not without agency, and can – within the limits of a set of hegemonies – articulate existing elements into

particular discourses. Through their practices and discourses, organizations also support, normalize, and sometimes undermine and contradict existing cultural configurations. Their voices contribute to society's discursive production, always entailing the promise of social change, but often contributing to the continued fixation of society's rigidities.

One way to theorize (and name) these discursive productive capacities is to return to Deleuze and Guattari's work, and more specifically their notion of the machine. In their *Anti-Oedipus*, they define the machine as "a system of interruptions or breaks", whereas the breaks "should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow [...] that it cuts into" (1984:36 – emphasis removed). Deleuze and Guattari (1984:36) also point to the interconnectedness of machines when they say that "every machine is the machine of a machine". It is seen as the law of the production of production: "[...] every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it". Although Deleuze and Guattari often apply their machine concept to the human body (e.g., the mouth-machine), they also use the machine concept in a much broader way, for instance in talking about abstract machines such as capitalism. As Raunig (2007:147) points out, in Guattari's (1972) first machine text (*Machine and Structure*, originally written in 1969) he uses the machine to discuss the revolutionary organization as an institutional machine that does not become a state or party structure. Without being completely faithful to Guattari's framework, which sees the machine as unstructuralizable (see Genosko 2002:197), his theoretical reflections on the revolutionary machine allow me to articulate the organization as a discursive machine, which is contingent on, but also embedded in, fields of discursivity and continuous productivity.

Mainstream Media Organizations

Mainstream media organizations are firmly embedded within a capitalist context, which structures and fixates many of the organizational characteristics, which can again be analysed by reverting to the basic two-dimensional model introduced earlier. As Cottle (2003:3) formulates it, "[...] media industries are businesses, sites of investment and sources of employment". At the level of the internal-material, mainstream media organizations group a wide variety of people and objects, but simultaneously they structure these actors in specific ways. McQuail (1994:191), for instance, mentions three basic categories within the organization, media professionals, management and technical staff, which

all perform specific roles and conform to specific identities, and contribute to organizational objectives in different (and sometimes contradictory) ways. In addition, but separated from the management, also the category of the owner(s) plays a crucial role in the organizational media sphere (Picard and van Weezel 2008). Within (but also beyond) these basic categories, the actors find themselves situated in complex power structures that are nevertheless often still characterized by strong vertical hierarchies and arbolic structures, that allow for only more minimal forms of participation by non-members, as for instance in genres like the talk show and reality-television. Apart from human actors, there is a wide range of objects, among which so-called media technologies play a crucial role. Together, these people and objects are set to achieve a number of mixed goals, which, according to Tunstall (1971:51), combine revenue goals (audience revenue goals and advertiser revenue goals) and non-revenue goals (gaining prestige, exercising influence but also serving a nation). The balance between these different objectives is not necessarily stable, as Tunstall (1971:50) notes in remarking that “A continual process of bargaining takes place as to which goals should be pursued”.

Also the (mainstream) media organization’s interorganizational network and organizational environment are specific, because they obviously have strong communicative objectives. The process of media production requires the establishment and maintenance of connections with large-sized audience groups that consume these media products, which in turn result in the media organizations’ ambition to maximize the circulation of these (symbolic or physical) objects. Moreover, mainstream media organizations are dependent for their revenues on advertisers, sponsors and governments, and for their functioning on a wide range of suppliers and service providers. And – through processes of economic convergence, and vertical and horizontal integration – they are often connected to other (media) organizations. As the domain of media production is considered to be of high societal relevance, a wide range of other actors has taken a keen interest in the media sphere, a situation – articulated by Gerbner (1969) as institutional pressures – that has led to the development of media regulation and media activism.

At the discursive level, media organizations accommodate a series of identities that play a key role in the (media) organizational culture. The journalistic identity, and its articulation with professionalism, is worth mentioning here because it combines notions of public service, ethics, management of resources, autonomy, membership of a professional elite, the need for immediacy, and objectivity (see Deuze 2005; Carpentier 2005). But the journalistic identity is only one of the many subject positions that circulate within media organizations. Also media leadership (which includes both ownership and management) plays a crucial role. Given the media sphere’s intimate connection with the capitalist economy and the dominant articulations of leadership it brings about, media

leadership (or corporate governance) unavoidably becomes embedded within vertical hierarchies and structurally consolidated unequal power relationships, although there are many variations of leadership in the corporate world, and resistance against unequal power relationships is omnipresent (Spice and Böhm 2007). At the same time, “[l]eadership in media companies”, as Pérez-Latre and Sánchez-Tabernero emphasize (2003:200), also “has some unique characteristics”,

Employees are not used to accept without any reservation directions coming from above. [...] Those responsible for content – journalists, screenwriters, copywriters and so on – are not always the best team-workers, defend tenaciously their own decisions, and tend to consider what their bosses have to say as unjustified meddling. In more news-oriented media, journalists often desire editorial freedom and protection from managers’ and owners’ influences.

Referring to Underwood (1995 – see also McManus 1994), Achtenhagen and Raviola (2009:34) point to the “perpetuous competition between product design and management”, which has (in the case of newspaper companies) been structurally resolved by the creation of what Achtenhagen and Raviola call duality management, where an editor-in-chief is responsible for the daily product and the publisher acts as business director. This type of division of labour increases the number of leadership positions and power centres, which necessitates more coordination and negotiation, but it does not necessarily decrease the intrinsic vertical nature (of each) of the different power hierarchies. Within the (semi-) separated realms of media organizations, these vertical hierarchies continue to provide dominant leadership models, which moreover support a strong border between members and non-members of mainstream media organizations.

The specific position of (mainstream) media organizations within society strengthens their role as discursive machines. Obviously, media products have achieved a pervasive and spectacular presence in everyday life, to the degree that they have become difficult to (desire to) escape from. These media products are carriers of a multitude of discourses, which in many cases are contradictory, but they do not always evade the workings of hegemony. Especially the discourses *about* the media sphere offer legitimizations for the media organization’s hegemonic practices and cultures. Media products, for instance, are carriers of normalizing discourses about the media organization’s claims to direct access to reality, its centrality and its elitist position in society. But they include also normalizations of mainstream media production cultures, where media professionals still hold strong – sometimes post-political – positions of power to internally manage the resources deemed necessary and to provide publicness and visibility to, and framings for, other societal actors. In this sense (mainstream) media organizations are machines that interrupt, channel, fixate and produce flows. Their position also brings contestation, struggle,

resistance and instability because the ways that they interrupt, channel, fixate and produce flows are not always accepted.

Contestations of the Mainstream Media Organizational Model

However dominant the mainstream media organizational logics, there are two structural contestations of (some of) its basic premises. The first contestation is grounded in the sphere of alternative and community media organizations, which introduced during the first stage of democratization of the media sphere a different model of media organization. This alternative model was a critical response to the internal logics of mainstream media organizations, and their construction as large-scale, vertically structured, arbolic, sometimes bureaucratic organizations, run by managers and staffed by professionals and geared towards large, homogeneous (segments of) audiences. The alternative model critiques the nature of the external-material articulation of mainstream media as closely connected or part of the arbolic networks of state and market. On an external-discursive level, mainstream media are critiqued for being carriers of dominant discourses and representations.

The alternative organizational model consists of organizations that are horizontally structured, and that facilitate audience access and participation within the frame of democratization and multiplicity. This alternative organizational model articulates media organizations as small-scale, and independent of state and market, but part of the rhizomatic network of civil society and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, and respecting of their diversity. At the level of the discursive, alternative and community media are articulated as carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter-hegemonic) discourses and representations, which also value the principles of participation and self-representation. The critical stance towards the production values of the media professional working in mainstream media has also led to a diversity of formats and genres, and creates room for experimentation with content and form. One of the clearest examples of these articulations can be found in the introduction to Girard's *A Passion for Radio*, where he formulates the following answer to the question:

a passion for [community] radio?: The answer to that question can be found in a third type of radio – an alternative to commercial and state radio. Often referred to as community radio, its most distinguishing characteristic is its commitment to community participation at all levels. While listeners of commercial radio are able to participate in the programming in limited ways – via open line telephone shows or by requesting a favourite song, for example

- community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors and even owners of the stations (Girard 1992:2).

This commitment to “community participation at all levels” (Girard 1992:2) also affects the internal structures and organizational cultures of these alternative and community media organizations, resulting in (a preference for) strong democratic internal decision-making processes. As research in new social movements has exemplified (Herda-Rapp 1998; Barker *et al.* 2001), this does not imply that there are no power imbalances within these organizations, or that formal and informal leadership does not exist. But, arguably, the radical commitment to internal democracy does imply an alternative model of leadership, that – inspired by the work of Lewin and his colleagues (Lewin & Lippitt 1938; Lewin, Lippitt and White 1939; White & Lippitt 1960)) – can be termed democratic leadership. Gastil (1994) summarizes the characteristics of (this early model of) democratic leadership by referring to group decision-making, active member involvement, honest praise and criticism and a degree of comradeship. In his review of the more recent literature on democratic leadership, Gastil (1994) distinguishes three primary characteristics: the distribution of responsibility within the demos, the empowerment of the membership and aiding the demos in its deliberations. Within the sphere of alternative and community media organizations, democratic leadership often implies joint-decision making supported by elected leaders (either paid staff members or volunteers), resulting in high levels of debate, dialogue and deliberation with members (and non-members).

The second structural contestation of the mainstream media organizational model is situated in the third stage of democratization of the media sphere. In the discussions of online and/or digital democracy, the attention is shifted to another concept, that of community. Here, the argument is that (mainstream media) organizations are bypassed by communities of users. One component of this argument is the virtual community’s capacity to bring people together. For instance, Rheingold’s (2002:2) definition of virtual community includes the verb “to organize”, but it is the community that is the location of the process, not the organization.

- Organized around affinities, shared interests, bringing together people who did not necessarily know each other before meeting online.
- Many to many media [...]
- Text-based, evolving into text plus graphics-based communications [...]
- Relatively uncoupled from face-to-face social life in geographic communities [...]

Castells (1996:352) employs a similar definition in his *The Rise of the Network Society*, which also uses the verb ‘to organize’ in relation to the virtual com-

munity. Moreover, he emphasizes the possible and relative formalization of communities, which again are (implicitly) contrasted with organizations. He defines the virtual community as:

a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organized around a shared interest or purpose, although sometimes communication becomes the goal in itself. Such communities may be relatively formalized, as in the case of hosted conferences or bulletin board systems, or be spontaneously formed by social networks, which keep logging into the network to send and retrieve messages in a chosen time pattern (either delayed or in real time).

The emphasis on community increases with the success of web 2.0, which became seen as juxtaposed to mainstream media organizations. Shirky's (2008:29) book "Here Comes Everybody. The Power of Organizing Without Organizations", for instance, contains the following statement about organizations and their management: "The typical organization is hierarchical, with workers answering to a manager, and that manager answering to a still-higher manager, and so on". Although it is not always made explicit, the focus of these kinds of analyses is often on the commercial media organization, which functions as a constitutive outside for new "non-hierarchical and collaborative forms of organization" (O'Sullivan 2009:87). Groups and communities (and not organizations) are the structuring components of these forms of collaboration and co-creation, and the invisible hand of membership behaviour, driven by common interest, seems to make governance unnecessary. Shirky (2008:47) uses the concept of the post-managerial organization, but in practice he refers to "loosely coordinated groups [that] can now achieve things that were previously out of reach for any other organizational structure [...]". Similarly, Jenkins (2006:243) constructs a juxtaposition between commercial media organizations and bottom-up consumption and production practices, in *Convergence Culture*, which he defines as a move towards "ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture". On the one hand consumers, as groups or communities, are "asserting their right to participate in the culture, on their own terms, when and where they wish" (Jenkins 2006:175). Corporate organizations, on the other hand, fall into two groups, prohibitionists and collaborationists. According to Jenkins (2006:175):

Corporations imagine participation as something they can start and stop, channel and reroute, commodify and market. The prohibitionists are trying to shut down unauthorized participation; the collaborationists are trying to win grassroots creators over to their side.

In contrast to these corporate organizations, Jenkins (2006:260) stresses the importance of what he calls consumption communities, for instance when he

writes, “A politics of participation starts from the assumption that we may have greater collective bargaining power if we form consumption communities”. Jenkins does not entirely shy away from the notions of organization and leadership since he uses the concept of adhocracy. Jenkins links this organizational concept to the work of the science fiction writer Cory Doctorow (2003), but it features also in earlier writings such as Toffler (1970) and Waterman (1990). Here, the bureaucratic organization becomes the constitutive outside, as the adhocratic organization is “characterized by a lack of hierarchy. In it, each person contributes to confronting a particular problem as needed based on his or her knowledge and abilities, and leadership roles shift as tasks change” (Jenkins 2006:262).

Another concept frequently used in this context is community of practice, originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991 – see also Wenger 1998). As Wenger *et al.* (2002:4) put it, communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”. Shirky, and also O’Sullivan (2009) in his analysis of Wikipedia, translates this concept to the context of social media. Again, the notion of the community is lauded as an alternative form of organization, which does not incorporate the problems related to the organization as structure:

Communities of practice are inherently cooperative, and are beautifully supported by social tools, because that is exactly the kind of community whose members can recruit one another or allow themselves to be found by interested searchers. They can thrive and even grow to enormous size without advertising their existence in public (Shirky 2008:101).

But in contrast to Shirky, O’Sullivan (2009:86) does pay attention to governance – in this case, of Wikipedia – referring to a “hierarchy of mutual respect”. Given Wikipedia’s nature – a hybrid mixture between community and organization – it comes as no surprise that O’Sullivan formulates a description of governance that is reminiscent of the democratic leadership mentioned earlier:

Of course, even Wikipedia, discourse-centred and democratic as it is, requires some form of leadership or overseeing. This is provided by a small number of editors who have system administrator privileges [...] These administrators, or ‘sysops’, have been elected by a peer review process, and are people who have proved their engagement with Wikipedia over time. Hence, the system is based on a hierarchy of mutual respect, as well as a general recognition by most users that it is to everyone’s advantage to have some decision-makers with certain privileges (O’Sullivan 2009:86).

The (Maximalist-)Participatory Organization

New media theories' focus on community, and the (at least partial) discrediting of the concept of the organization, combined with the importance attached to more horizontally structured organizations based on democratic leadership, necessitates a more thorough reflection on the importance of the organization in relation to more maximalist participatory processes. This does not imply that the notion of community should necessarily be discredited, nor does it mean that the connections between community and organization should be ignored. For instance, Jenkins's (2006) work – and especially his reference to adhocracies – shows how closely related are communities and organization. Moreover, as Williams (1981:76) puts it in his Keywords, communities can materialize in organizations:

The complexity of community thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this.

But arguably, the organization remains an important social structure, different from the community (and the group) because of its logics of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization. Reducing the concept of the organization to the antipode of the multiplicity, to a position of minimalist participation or non-participation, would be too simple. The alternative media organizational models, in particular, show that it is possible to attribute a significant role to the organization as a tool for and location of the more maximalist forms of participation and democratic leadership.

To make this argument I need to return to the original discussion of the definitions and characteristics of organizations structured by the two-dimensional model I used before (see Figure 1). At the material level, organizations articulate people and objects within an entity, with the ambition to realize specific objectives (through the processes of functionalization, coordination, finalization, formalization and centralization). The existence of a formal organizational structure allows an explicit definition of participation as (one of) the objective(s) of the organization, which commits the people involved, and embeds the notion of participation in the material practices of the organization, at the levels of decision-making procedures and production practices. The formalization of participation as an objective, and the explicit commitment and responsibility of its members to protect it, offers an organizational shelter (and often a material space) for these (maximalist) participatory practices, in a societal context that is not always appreciative of the more maximalist forms of participation and democratic leadership.

Moreover, participatory media organizations are nodal points in rhizomes of participatory and civil society organizations. Their presence in these rhizomes often plays a strengthening role, as they are instrumental in the articulation of these networks. The rhizomes also have a protective role in making the incorporation by market and state actors more difficult. An analysis of two Brussels-based alternative radio stations (Santana and Carpentier 2010) shows how their many radio programmes (each with its own producer(s)) were almost all connected to one or more civil society organizations and to other alternative media organizations. Together they formed a substantial network of organizations that included human rights, feminist and pacifist organizations, art house cinemas, and alternative record labels. The participation in this network of state and market organizations was limited. Networks in which participatory media organizations feature vary in scale, but are often highly localized. In some cases, participatory media organizations move beyond the local but continue to protect their local embeddedness, a process I describe (see Carpentier 2008) as translocalism, based on Appadurai's (1995) conceptual work. In even fewer cases, participatory media organizations become part of what Keane (2003) calls global civil society.

Figure 2. The Significance of Participatory Media Organizations

	Material	Discursive
Internal	Participation as objective; Space for participation; Horizontal organizational structures	Participatory culture and democratic leadership decision- making; Egalitarian subject positions and participatory attitudes; Cultural archive Discursive machinery
External	Nodal points in participatory networks/rhizomes; Often local; sometimes translocal, rarely global	producing discourses of participation in media output, in discursified material practices and in external communication

The importance of participatory media organizations can also be argued for at the discursive level because their organizational cultures can be seen as cherishing a participatory culture at the levels of both production and management. Their formal decision-making structures, combined with their objective to facilitate participation, create an ongoing need to democratize their own structures and to create and protect internal power balances. As the maintenance of egalitarian and horizontal structures and democratic leadership practices requires almost continuous effort, and as challenges to this power balance constantly

lurk around the corner, the discourse of participation and democracy plays a key role in the organizational culture. This, in turn, renders these participatory media organizations centres of expertise based on the considerable amount of knowledge on the practical organization of participatory processes and how to overcome the many problems these processes encompass. The longer that these participatory media organizations have been in existence, the larger are their archives of participatory knowledge. Participatory media organizations are also sites of more egalitarian subject positions. The concepts of the professional, the producer, the audience and the manager all receive different – non-mainstream – articulations, in which elitist positionings are avoided and where the audience becomes radically activated.

Their activities as media organizations often render their participatory back-stages visible and translate their material participatory practices into discourse. Combined with their more explicit communicative activities, which demonstrate the workings of access, interaction and participation in the field of media production, these participatory media organizations are discursive machines that allow for the *mettre en discours* of participation. Care should be taken not to romanticize them; frequently they fail because of their tendencies towards lethargy, isolationism, conflict and even self-destruction. A painfully good example is the conflict-ridden US-based Pacifica Network (Lasar 2000; Dunaway 2005). But these crisis moments can be constitutive, and offer purifying rituals that enhance their participatory natures.

Conclusion

This text should not be seen as a plea to ignore the importance of mainstream media organizations, nor should it be interpreted as a naïve celebration of alternative forms of media organizations that aim to discredit the multitude of communities and social groups that, in many cases, uphold maximalist articulations of participation, democratic leadership and material participatory practices. In the processes of social change, in which the media sphere is characterized by an increased diversity of actors, discourses and practices, all types of social structures can take on key roles. We should avoid privileging one specific type of structure, whether it be the traditional vertically structured media organization, the social group, the community or the alternative, more horizontally structured, media organization. Nevertheless, we must avoid stepping into the trap of using the (neo-)liberal dichotomy between a problematized macro-structure (whether the state or mainstream media) and a celebrated micro-structure of non-organized citizens. We must also avoid myopia when analysing the democratic practices in online environments. The history of the democratization of the media sphere does not start at the end of the 20th century, but the struggle

to have ordinary voices heard has been waged from more than a few decades. Moreover, the sometimes wonderful outcomes of the earlier stages of democratization are still very present in the media landscapes, and their experiences, discourses and practices should remain part of how the democratization of the media sphere in the contemporary era is addressed, organized and evaluated.

In this text I want to explicitly stress the importance of creating organizational nodal points in the multitude that will allow maximalist participation to be identified as an explicit objective; that channel and fixate the commitment of people towards participatory media production; that allow forms of governance based on democratic leadership, that generate physical and virtual spaces for participation; that allow for the intentional creation of participatory rhizomes at the local, translocal, glocal and global level; that provide safe havens for participatory cultures and egalitarian subject positions; that allow the storage and reuse of participatory experiences in cultural archives and centres of expertise; and that support the production of participation through their discursive machineries.

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II

Transforming Media Producers

Dirty Work

Why Journalists Shun Reader Comments

Dino Viscovi & Malin Gustafsson

For at least half a decade, applications that enable readers to comment on news articles have more or less become a standard feature in online newspapers, in Sweden as in other countries. Despite its history, the arrangement still has not assumed its definite form, nor has it been proven satisfactory to the publishers. In Sweden, a debate about how to deal with “web hatred” has been going on during 2011 among leading publicists; the tone in the reader’s comments is thought to be too harsh and disrespectful – and the opinions expressed xenophobic and populist (e.g. Frigyes 2011).

Yet, journalists in general – as well as the interviewees in this study at the local newspaper Smålandsposten and its online edition Smp.se – have no difficulties in pointing out the positive aspects of the application, both democratic and commercial ones (cf. Nygren 2008; Witschge 2012). They see democratic potential in offering the readers a chance to express their opinions to the public, and they also describe opportunities for further development. If the comments would be better sorted, edited and moderated, they could have a vitalizing effect on democracy and the online newspaper edition could become an arena where both politicians and ordinary citizens could interact and reason about urgent issues.

In addition, journalists see commercial potential in the application, as it involves the readers. It establishes a new relation primarily between the newspaper and people who comment on a regular basis, but also readers who particularly appreciate user generated content (some of the readers of Smp.se actually choose to click on the comments before they click on the articles). Moreover, by commenting on articles, readers produce content for the newspaper – but on a voluntary basis and without payment. This “free lunch” is considered to be an asset that ought to be taken advantage of somehow.

In contrast to these expectations, however, media research shows a practice in which there is a widespread discontent with user generated content (UGC), no matter whether it is about news production, blogs, or – which is the case here – commented articles.

Basically, journalists question the quality of UGC. They believe that the material has low news value, and that, as Örnebring (2008) has shown, it often concerns personal issues and is connected to life-style or popular culture, rather than informative news. Journalists further describe a user generated content characterized by many linguistic errors, xenophobic views and racism. The content is also considered biased and based on vague and unverified facts. Moreover, the editing is said to be time-consuming, and to hinder journalists from carrying out other tasks that are considered more important. (Hermida & Thurman 2007; Domingo 2008; Hermida & Thurman 2008; Nygren 2008; Paulussen & Ugille 2008; Thurman 2008; Witschge 2012).

The hopes for interactivity and participation – where former “passive” readers become *prod-users* (Bruns 2008) or *ProAms* (Laedbeater & Miller 2004) – meaning new roles and relations between journalism and the public, have not come true. In essence, for news organizations UGC tends to be considered more of a problem than an opportunity (e.g. Deuze *et al.* 2004; Domingo 2008; Thurman 2008; Örnebring 2008). At large, online-journalism seems to work in the same way as traditional mass communication, albeit with a hint of something new. Jönsson and Örnebring (2011:14) argue that the audience is caught in a “... reactive position”, which means that “... ‘We write, you read’ becomes ‘We write, you read and possibly comment’...”

If journalists see possibilities with the new technology: why does journalism fail to take advantage of the participatory opportunities brought about by UGC? The question has been asked by many researchers, who have given different explanations on both macro and micro level. It has been claimed that the whole system of news production is based on a mass communication model, where there is no room for new roles and relations – particularly not in a period of downsizing. Research has also emphasized the organizational logic of journalism, working routines, editorial practices – and the professional culture (Domingo 2008; Paulussen & Ugille 2008; Jönsson & Örnebring 2011).

Even though it must be obvious that these different levels influence each other in reality, the cultural path is, nevertheless, worth following. Domingo (2008), in particular, emphasises the great importance of professional culture. “The fact is”, Domingo writes (2008:680-81), “that we know very little about how online journalists deal with interactivity in their daily working routines and what is the rationale behind the development of interactive options on online news sites.”

Professional culture is, just like “culture” in general, a broad and comprehensive concept. Culture in the sense of “a whole way of life” (Williams 1961) or fairly common norms, values, knowledge and traditions include several aspects of human life. To adduce culture or professional culture as explanatory factors might be too wide and general. Therefore, our aim is to analyse professional culture in more detail in order to identify some of the cultural features

or qualities that give UGC in general and commented articles in particular such a marginal position in journalism. Our proposal is that a focus on professional hierarchies (see below) can produce some new insights.

Method and Materials

This study is based on eleven semi-structured interviews carried out in spring 2011. All interviewees worked for the newspaper *Smålandsposten* and *Smp.se*. They worked in different positions within the organization; most of them were journalists and reporters, a few worked with editing and one was the editor in chief. Six of them were men and six were women (two were interviewed at the same time). The reporters and editors worked with local news, sports, culture, feature, investigative journalism, in-depth studies and the op-ed page.

The interviewees have varying backgrounds – some have studied journalism at university or college, others have received most of their training by working in different media organizations. The number of years that they have been working in the profession also differs from person to person, but most of them have several years of experience from the field. Their careers have typically started with internships or short-term jobs in different media organizations.

The interviews were all held at the newspaper office and varied in length from about 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. They were recorded and transcribed shortly afterwards. The transcriptions make up about 138 pages of text and about 97,000 words.

To create an overview of the UGC and, above all, the comments posted by the readers, a content analysis of articles and comments in the newspaper's web edition was carried out. All articles published on *Smp.se* during one week were collected and the articles where readers had posted comments were counted. Out of almost 470 articles, 76 contained comments.

The Comment System

Readers can post comments on most articles on *Smp.se* by typing their text in the comment box below the article. Before a comment is actually published on *Smp.se*, however, an editor has to accept it. To publish a comment sent in by a reader, the editor logs in to the system, reads the comment, and chooses whether to publish it or not. This is done regularly throughout the day. The editors may also choose to edit comments before publishing them; they can, for example, correct spelling mistakes or publish only parts of a comment.

Smp.se has a discussion policy, which for example states that comments may not contain more than 700 characters, should stick to the subject, and

must be written in Swedish. Furthermore, comments must not contain sexist or obscene language, threats, lies, harassments, or any commercial messages. Comments about ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, political views, profession or religious views will not be accepted, if they are not of relevance to the specific context. Smp.se also encourages commenters to sign their comments with their real names.

Smp.se tried post-moderation of the comments for a while, but switched to pre-moderation, as many comments contained sexist or xenophobic views, threats and other unpleasant statements. In September 6, 2010, Smp.se introduced a new comment system, called Disqus, which holds that readers must either register or login with their Facebook accounts to be able to comment. This enables the editors to see who has posted a comment and to contact the commenter if needed. After introducing the new system, the number of comments posted on Smp.se decreased and comments containing rude language and coarse remarks became less common.

Professional Culture, Quality and Hierarchy

Many researchers have investigated the professional culture or ideology of journalism (e.g. Deuze 2007; Aldridge & Evetts 2003). Values, beliefs, working practices etc. have been described and analysed. Less often, researchers have drawn attention to status and hierarchy within the profession, which is the subject of the following paper.

Hierarchies are present in nearly all professions. Not only because there are managers and employees, but also because there are more or less desirable tasks to do – and it is the latter that is the central theme here. Let us start the discussion by looking at a completely different field, namely, cooking. In restaurants, new employees might begin their career by peeling potatoes and chopping onions. After a certain time they may be allowed to use the oven and perhaps to cook potatoes or fry some meat. Eventually, they may become responsible for certain dishes. The task that is considered to be the most desirable and prestigious in this hierarchy is to have the gastronomic responsibility for the menu, which means a responsibility for everything from buying the ingredients to serving the dish to the guests. The head chef's high status is not only due to his or her being in charge of and supervising the work, but probably above all, it is related to his or her being the director, or even the “author” – the person who through his or her professional skills and creativity can add a personal touch to the dish served.

Learning a profession does not only include acquiring a certain kind of knowledge and skill. Parallel to the formal training, the apprentice becomes socialized into a cultural system specific to the profession (see Abbott 1981

below) – and a standard of quality – which defines what distinguishes a good piece of work from a poorer. A trained chef knows the difference between a well-cooked stew and a mediocre, and usually has a professional pride that fosters him or her an ambition to achieve high quality.

Thus, learning a profession means being socialized into a cultural system and a quality standard. Furthermore, professionals in general strive to work with skilled tasks at the top of the quality hierarchy. Similar patterns exist within many professions and trades; for example, in nursing, plumbing, engineering, as well as in journalism. In Sweden, there are plenty of biographies in which senior journalists describe how their careers began with them riding their bikes to different sports events from which they delivered the scores to the office. Others began writing short paragraphs on local occurrences in the countryside. By showing commitment and perseverance they could advance to the editorial office – and were soon allowed to write real articles and take on even more qualified tasks. Their careers can be regarded as a kind of trajectory, where they move towards more and more labour-intensive and qualified tasks – and higher and higher in the professional hierarchy.

In addition, journalists are, as we will see below, generally well aware of the fact that they are parts of a larger organization of production, where all parts, even the small and insignificant ones, are important in order to form a unity of quality and attractiveness – in the same way as the whole kitchen at a restaurant has to perform well in order to create an appetizing smorgasbord.

A newspaper is – as research in the field constantly reminds us – in many aspects an industrially produced artefact (Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1980). People who receive training to become journalists are very soon informed that their chances of cultivating their own artistic style are usually quite small. Those who dream about becoming writers are recommended to tone their literary ambitions down. Because in journalism it is more about learning to produce text at a certain pace and to stick to very precise and impersonal generic rules.

Despite the awareness of these collective and industrial traits of journalism, journalists still express an ambition to work freely and be creative. The journalists in this study typically describe attractive work in such terms:

It is obviously a lot more fun to do stuff that you've initiated yourself and have taken part in from the beginning, than to just get something on your desk every morning.

If today I would have been free to decide on what I wanted to do, I'd might try to work with sports too. But maybe not with this kind of traditional sports coverage, but more with that of which you talk about as investigative journalism, that is more investigative sports journalism.

Two reporters are especially satisfied with their new work situation at the office, which enables them to do: "...deeper reports, longer reports. [...] to kind

of devote more time to stuff than you have actually been able to do before.” The other reporter says: “[I] felt that sort of longer texts were more appealing and maybe to have more time to write long and get one step further.”

To have more time, to do in-depth journalism, to investigate and to work freely with their own ideas are high on the journalists’ list of priorities. It is hardly possible to find anything in the interviews that contradicts this opinion, that is, a wish to do ordinary routine jobs. One of the reporters that currently works only with editing says: “It’s not a journalistic job, there are no challenges, no creativity – no room for initiatives and stuff like that. So this is just a way to make a living.”

Needless to say, the journalists do not long for the assembly line, but rather for the opposite. They want to be creative and want to have the chance to use a wide range of professional skills – but within the framework of a news organization’s mode of production. One reporter says this is part of the charm with journalism; being inventive under pressure and having a certain space to fill every day. The reporter describes his first experiences of the demands to deliver: “...personally I think it’s pretty nice”, to: “be standing there at one o’clock not knowing what to do... and like four hours left of the working day and ... But I mean, you always made it.”

These preferences – the wish to work more freely with skilled tasks and less by routine are hardly surprising, they follow expected patterns. Ever since the beginning of industrialism, philosophers and researchers have been both amazed and shocked by the ever-growing division of labour. Famous is Adam Smith’s analysis of the organization needed for the production of something as simple as pins (Freidson 2001). The process is efficient, Smith says, it is an expression of a high level of civilization and creates wealth; if humanity can get more out of its achievements it is a good thing. But there is of course a human price to rationalization too. Later, Marx emphasizes this side of industrial work even more (Marx 1964). Alienation means man becomes estranged from both the product he produces and the production process itself. The worker does, because of the procedures of industry, not see any meaning in what is produced and does, furthermore, not get anything other than his or her wage out of labour. In other words, the monotonous and un-free labour impoverishes the soul and tears the body down.

A lot has happened since the advent of the early manufactures and the industries of the 1800s, both regarding the actual contents of labour and regarding opinions and thoughts on labour. But still today we distinguish between different kinds of work. If there are alternatives, people usually choose free, creative and varying tasks, where they can make use of many of their competences, rather than un-free and monotonous tasks where they are not allowed to use their fantasy and only a very small part of their human capacities.¹ Journalists are no exception – which partly explains their indifferent relation to the UGC. For instance, also

Domingo (2008:694) notes that: "Forum moderation could actually become a nightmare for online newsrooms [...] web management journalists deemed it as one of the most boring routines." An editor interviewed by Hermida & Thurman (2007:20) declares that: "Moderation is 'a real pain, it's a real chore'".

Does this mean that journalists simply have aversion to easy tasks, and want to do more qualified things than to handle UGC? To some extent yes, but journalism is full of routine chores performed every day and without complaint. The journalists edit news releases, call the police, the SOS Alarm Centre, go to the district court, etc. Something is missing in our analysis.

Pure and Dirty Journalism?

The sociologist Andrew Abbott (1981) has examined status hierarchies within professions in detail and has identified further aspects of them. Even if journalism is usually considered a semi-profession (Aldridge & Evetts 2003; Nygren 2008), vital parts of his discussion are applicable also within this context. In his analysis, Abbott notices that within the medical profession, surgeons have a higher status than general practitioners – and specialists in surgery have an even higher status. Within the justice field, working with corporate law has a higher status than working with domestic law. Why do these differences exist? Is it a matter of money, or power? It might be, Abbott says, but it does not fully explain the phenomenon. Low status solo lawyers working with probate, divorce etc. could actually earn more than lawyers working with corporate law. And – another example – deans at the departments of universities often have more power than professors, but they rarely have a higher professional status. Finally, non-routine work could be another explanation, (less routine means higher status). But the issue of routine is complicated, says Abbott; it is not necessarily the case that general practitioners do less routine work than specialists.

What other factors are there that influence the status in a profession? Abbott turns to Mary Douglas and her analysis of taboos and more specifically "dirt" in *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas claims, as is well known, dirt has to be understood in relation to cultural systems. Dirt is not dirt in itself, but simply something that does not fit into the categories of the cultural system: dirt is a matter out of place.

Knowledge specific for a profession may, according to Abbott (1981:823), be regarded as a cultural system, and, he continues: "Intraprofessional status is in reality a function of professional purity." Status may hence be understood as varying degrees of purity; some tasks are purer than others. Divorces are for lawyers not as pure as issues about corporate tax, since divorces involve concrete, physical persons and are mixed with emotions and quarrels. Corporate law deals with legal persons and is therefore in comparison more formal,

which means fewer arguments and less emotion, that is, a purer law. Abbott (1981:824) further points out that: "The professionally defined or definable is more pure than the undefined or indefinable. The clear is more pure than the amorphous, the definite more pure than ambiguous."

As shown above, journalists want to work with in-depth and investigative journalism. They want to work freely with their own original ideas, but not only because this is considered more stimulating and creative. The journalists express, as we see it, a desire to conduct pure journalism. UGC and commented articles, on the other hand, are anomalies which do not fit existing cultural (i.e. professional) categories, and therefore seem to represent the impure. Let us elaborate this argument further.

200 Years of UGC

UGC is not a new phenomenon that has appeared with the advent of the Internet or Web 2.0. At the beginning of the Swedish newspaper industry, a large proportion of the content was produced by the audience. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, newspapers were usually founded by book printers who encouraged their circle of readers to contribute. The contributions were not necessarily letters to the editor; they took various forms such as essays, travelogues and book reviews of theses (Lundell 2002). In the early newspapers there was hence no clear distinction between that which the newspaper office produced – which in contemporary sense can hardly be said to have existed at all – and that which the readers produced. It was not until the mid-1800s that a publicist profession started to take shape and as a result UGC became more and more the exception. Lundell (2010) points out that the journalist professional identity was partly created in contrast to the writers from the audience, who, the professionals felt, were driven by self-interest, and therefore were less suited to have journalistic responsibility.

The only individual actually capable of rising above self-interest was the independent editor, by virtue of his being a professional. The editor, and the editor only, could lead and educate public thinking and give the same public a voice. Thus, what happened was that an existing, participatory public was degraded to a passive audience that received the teachings of professional editors (Lundell 2010:440).

The audience ceased to be prod-users; they were set to be nothing but audience, whose task was to read the professionals' texts. However, the public's contributions in the form of letters to the editor did not completely disappear, but it was given less and less space, and was hence step by step reduced to certain sections in the newspaper, or was at least clearly separated from other editorial material.

Notwithstanding, letters to the editor are still of great importance in the Nordic daily press (Elvestad 2009; Viscovi 2011). They do not only exist in small local newspapers. Even Sweden's largest newspapers like Aftonbladet or Dagens Nyheter contain sections for letters to the editor. It is important to emphasize that the contributions described here are generally not written by the social elite, as the elite has other arenas for debate. The letters are mostly written by the general public (Viscovi 2011).

The readers appreciate the letters to the editor. More than 40 % state they read a lot or quite a lot of that material, which is a slightly higher rating than the sports section usually gets (Strid 2008).

Despite its popularity, the letter to the editor has had a low status among professional journalists. An interesting case is *Ring P1* (Call Channel 1), which Nordberg (2006) has studied. *Ring P1* is an "phone-in programme" where listeners can present their own opinions on live radio. The idea is by no means unique, but the location of the program in the public service Channel 1, P1, is considered controversial. P1 is mainly for educated people; together with P2 – a channel that mainly plays classical music – it constitutes the only high-brow radio channel (Strid 2010). P1 plays almost no music and seldom has any elements of light entertainment. It focuses on politics, science and culture.

When *Ring P1* was first introduced, critics said it was the kind of radio that was only motivated by its low production costs. The contents were said to be of dubious quality and to only at best have vague connections to democratic values. "Truisms", claimed critics from the media elite, "unarticulated whining" and "drunk talk" have nothing to do with freedom of speech and citizenship (Nordberg 2006:8). Yet after twelve years of broadcasting the program is still being questioned. Expressen, the largest or second largest newspaper in Sweden, wrote the following in its editorial:

"Ring P1" spreads hatred and prejudice left un-contradicted, hour after hour after hour. Is Swedish Radio of the opinion that "stupid hatred" is an important cultural manifestation? Can we look forward to the impudent program "Call us and tell us what you actually think of homophiles!?" Or does public service want a profile built on xenophobia, which is said to be of advantage to society? It is actually not ok. Close down "Ring P1" (Marteus 2008 [our translation from Swedish]).

Among Swedish news journalists in general it has been the widespread opinion in the professional jargon that the position as the op-ed editor is a kind of banishment or professional exclusion. The op-ed editor at Smålandsposten and Smp.se does not contradict that; it is a job that you might get:

...when you are soon to retire [...] it's not a job that anybody wishes to have. When I applied for it, the chief editor got really shocked. And my colleagues too. Because I was very much of a journalist, one could say.

In conclusion, UGC has in a sense a longer history than news journalism and professional journalists. Lundell (2010) has shown that the profession partly legitimized itself and created its identity as a negation of the audience, which was considered to lack the qualities required for a responsible and independent journalism.

Although the letters to the editor today are clearly separated from editorial material – and appreciated by the readers – the letters are significantly unappreciated by journalists. Letters and UGC as well as the prod-users seem to represent amateurism in its worst sense: prejudice, self-interest, bad arguments, and drivel. Put another way, they are considered impure.

Identifying Dirt

Just like other professional skills, it takes time and effort to become a full-fledged journalist. The individual reporters have worked long to acquire their specific competences and hence an understanding of professional quality, which includes everything from style and headlining to source criticism and an understanding of newsworthiness. But as readers can now comment on articles, the journalists have to face the fact that their texts might appear alongside the readers' texts. What once was separated when the profession was formed, is now reunited on the web: a symbolic meeting that is not completely appreciated by the journalists. The reporters are quick to point out the differences in quality between their own and the readers' work.

The contributions are said to have obvious linguistic shortcomings: "It's not just spelling mistakes, but also the sentence structure, really, it's absolutely crazy." There are also "... lots of people that begin sentences in small, that is small letters and [...] smileys and all kinds of things." It might also be a matter of style and breach of style – a sort of collision with the journalists' text: "When somebody chooses to talk about something sensitive, personal or such – and there's sort of a certain tone in the text [...] ... And then there are like coarse remarks on it."

There could be a solution to this linguistic problem; people with proper education – that is the journalists themselves – could easily revise and moderate the texts sent in by the users. That task is, however, given low priority:

... we've decided that we won't put so much effort into them.

If I'm stressed, I won't sit there and correct spelling mistakes, I don't do that, instead I let them through with spelling mistakes.

A lot due to time issues and I guess one has gotten more used to people writing bad, but somehow it's not a problem, it's alright. No, I don't edit them, I don't.

The tolerance for linguistic shortcomings might have increased, but as a professional journalist you do, however, not accept making any mistakes yourself. Editorially produced texts should in all essentials be correct, especially in the printed newspaper: "It should be spelled correctly and with the right references and it should stick to the rules."

If we use Halliday's concepts (Halliday 1985), it is still not the language and the style, that is textual functions, which are perceived as most problematic – rather it is the ideational and interpersonal functions that cause discussion. Starting with the former, the ideational function, the journalists especially question the contents and the relevance of the comments. An ice hockey game may for example render several comments, but these are more emotional and ritual manifestations than substantial contributions.

"Lakers made it to the Elitserien [Swedens' premier ice hockey league], wow that's great, how fun" or "shit" or like "TAIF [ice hockey team] is crap". Yes, it's usually on that level.

I mean the wish to write comes out of an emotion, maybe, a lot of times – anger or irritation or that you're pissed off with something and you want to write it off. So perhaps not everyone writes to reason, argue for an opinion and kind of convince [...].

Journalism's own conceptions of facts, evidence and sources can of course be problematized, as well as its mythology about objectivity (Allan 2010). But the profession, nevertheless, has a negotiated idea of what constitutes "hard facts", which in this context means that feelings and opinions have a low degree of interest and relevance – at least, they are not relevant on their own merits. Likewise, journalists have learned that repetition is an abomination. Each paragraph should provide new information, but this is not really the case regarding reader comments. Redundancy is the rule rather than exception: "Oh, Lakers are better than Tingsryd' [ice hockey teams] [...] there [could] be thirty such comments before there was anything constructive in those discussions."

The idea of ProAms (Limonard 2007) and the like are described as a kind of academic idealism or wishful thinking; the assumption that the audience would have the skills to pursue journalism of quality is not reasonable. One journalist points out that "[...] the elaborate journalism" is not so...

...easy for people to perform themselves, as many perceive. Today, many probably see themselves as "yes but I can do this as well". And perhaps many, in many cases can. But to have the time to do 50 calls and pick up ten files from various public authorities – there aren't many so interested.

In short, believing things and having opinions, that is quite easy, according to the journalists, but to find, handle reliable sources and produce relevant news, is much more difficult – and not a thing that anybody can do or actually does.

The interpersonal function concerns, in this context, on the one hand, (i) relations between people mentioned in the text and the audience, on the other hand, (ii) relations between commenters (Fairclough 1995).

(i) **People in text and audience.** Journalists are not satisfied with how people they write about are treated by commenters: "... not everybody has that ethical gene in all situations, about how to behave." It can be anonymous individuals that are revealed by name. The protection of sources is thereby eliminated – and a vital professional value violated. Some people become exposed to disrespectful epithets.

I interviewed a girl who had [had problems] and told me that she had been, yes, back in school, she was bullied [...]. She was very open-hearted [...] Long interview. Published it. The first comment was something like "I remember you from school, you were so stuck up, and so blah, blah, blah". I mean, being bullied at school, talk about it, then – she shouldn't have to be bullied on the Internet [...].

Of course, journalists do not like rude comments *per se*, they are alien elements in the quality standards of professional journalism, but such comments also have a negative impact on the trust established between the journalist and the participants. Comments can actually impede the work of journalists in the long run.

I don't think they should have to put up with it, those interviewed in the newspaper, that they should be attacked on the web. They've accepted something, then they don't need to accept to be commented on by a bunch of fools on the net. It means that they won't participate next time, probably.

(ii) **Relations between commenters.** The code for the conversation between participants does not work very well, according to the journalists. Sensitive discussions, characterized by mutual respect, are rare events. Commenters:

[...] are directly unpleasant to others who are discussing. Like, no substantive comments, but personal attacks – they call people things.

They only yell at each other, finally.

It's person A [who] criticises person C – who isn't mentioned in the article – and then person B comes in, and then, well, mudslinging on all sides and edges.

The commenters' opinions are also perceived as a cause for concern. The media debate about "web hatred", mentioned above, as well as existing research have put forward that racism and xenophobia are prominent features in article comments. Smp.se makes no exception, according to the journalists:

There's a whole lot of xenophobia in the comments. [...] Anti-immigrants are experts in finding articles, even if it has nothing to do with it, but they manage to somehow link it to immigrants.

... the large quantity, it's racists going on in the usual manner, that "all problems in society will be solved, if we just close the borders and kick them out".

Up to now, the journalists have mainly or solely described a material of dubious journalistic value – despite its supposed democratic and commercial potentials. The readers comments are characterized by a bad use of language, irrelevant and repetitive information, misbehaviour and lack of ethics – and furthermore opinions that are considered unsound or illegitimate.

Prod-users, Audience and Sources

When we asked the journalists to make a characterization of the average commenter, some hesitation occurred. It may be that the task is difficult, since the commenters usually participate anonymously and probably are a heterogeneous group. It may also be due to a fear of expressing themselves prejudiced or disparaging, which, in some way, is latent in the predominantly negative description above of the content that users produce. However, some doubt not to use pejorative terms like "lunatics", "mob" or "fools".

Apart from this, the average commenter is believed to be male rather than female, low-skilled rather than highly educated, and probably middle-aged. "He" is politically engaged, perhaps too engaged, and may even have questionable motives, some seem to have a political agenda "... and want to change immigration policy."

The texts are poor, the writers dubious, but still, there must be some positive things to say about the users' and their contributions? Of course there are, journalists can give various examples – but these are somehow tentative or hypothetical. The comments could, or may in favourable cases, say journalists, lead to actual news, "new angles", "ideas for follow-ups", and commenters can now and then correct "factual errors". Sometimes constructive debates arise, especially when the Mayor or influential politicians are involved:

We have frequent commenters in politicians who actually write under their own names, NN [well-known politician], who writes and discusses policies [...] has started discussions between users. And when they are well thought out, it's just great, that's opinion building at high level.

The comments also have a symbolic and a quantitative value for the journalists. A lot of comments seem to confirm that a journalist has a number of readers, and that an article has a significant audience impact. Important to stress though

is that journalism, to a fairly high degree, is a performing profession or art (like singing or acting) where visibility and the audience's acclamation are important features. A frequent commentary is a positive confirmation and is interpreted as: " [...] a good sign that what we write affects people."

Personally I think it's fun with a lot of comments and clicks.

[...] You get a sense of "if it was appreciated, what you wrote about?". It's almost like the more comments the better. It becomes a bit like credit to yourself, that this was something that engaged. If you don't get a single comment, like: no, perhaps no one has read it at all.

Thus, the UGC may also have some appealing properties. The content can contribute to news tips, provide new angles and correct erroneous facts. Sometimes politicians participate and promote constructive debates. The comments also show – by their very existence – that journalists have attracted attention.

All in all, this description of the commenters is homologous to the journalist's traditional professional role or identity, and journalist's relations to sources and audience. The commenters are recognizable as, and treated as, sources from the general public, or – even better – the political elite. The commenters are also recognizable as a more or less anonymous audience that reads and reacts to news, in accordance with a standard model of mass communication. UGC in this sense is not "a matter out of place" – but rather 'matter in the right place'.

Discussion

Journalists, just like professionals in general, strive for free and creative tasks. This is not only a question of avoiding alienating routine work, it is also a desire for professional purity and status. In-depth stories or investigative journalism – that is labour-intensive tasks – are interesting *per se*, but are also means to approach professional purity and the traditional core values of journalism like independence, relevance, objectivity, factuality etc.

It is close at hand to conclude that readers' comments are regarded as dirty only because of their poor qualities; the interviewed journalists have identified a wide range of aspects that make the material less suitable for publication. This idea is also supported by the journalist's own use of language. The op-ed editor talks about the importance of "text laundering", i.e. to correct spelling, syntax, wording etc. Other journalists talk about the pre-moderation of UGC as a "filter" – in other words, a device designed to remove dirt.

But also texts without these shortcomings can be viewed as impure. In contrast, press releases are usually well written, formally as well as rhetorically;

not least because press officers quite often are former journalists (Palm 2002). Nevertheless, journalists are not willing to publish press releases without critical reflection (Larsson 2005). To be pure in a professional sense, the material must be processed and undergo a journalistic assessment where everything from tone and style to source criticism and newsworthiness is examined in order to qualify for publication.

It is certainly true that the press releases are routinely published, and many times relatively unchanged (Cameron *et al.* 1997). But the texts have been examined and evaluated in some way, and most importantly, the journalist acts as a gatekeeper, which means that most press releases end up in the trash.

The procedures of professional journalism also hold an economic rationality. The “business model” of news can be described as symbolic valorisation (Thompson 1990) or valorisation of text. The audience expects to find order, intelligibility and trustworthiness in the news media. Without it, people can do just as well on their own.

With the reader comments, the situation is different. The journalist role as a gatekeeper has changed to the role of a censor. The censor’s task consists in making a selection, just like the gatekeeper – but a negative selection. That is, texts that violate the rules are sorted out, the others are to be published and presented en masse, without editing. Perhaps this is as alien for journalists as for the chef to arrange a Dutch treat and serve all the food that guests have brought along, except for the food injurious to health.

Note

1. Cf. Ungdomsstyrelsen 2007, table 11.10. Jobs in culture/design/media rank high – in comparison to industry, military and the transport sector.

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Transmedia Storytelling and a Young Audience

Public Service in the Blogosphere Era

Ulrika Sjöberg & Ingegerd Rydin

Convergence culture and the transmedial distribution of programming, and other media services, have created both opportunities and challenges for new kinds of audio-visual stories and formats. The licence-fee financed public service company Swedish television (SVT) has introduced a number of online services since the mid-1990s, when it started to use the web. At present, SVT is investing a lot of effort and resources in developing new web services and ensuring that its site is competitive.

In this chapter, the challenges facing public service companies entering the blogosphere will be placed alongside the current debates about the changing conditions for the media industry due to digital media. It deals with the increasing tensions between professionalism and amateur culture, where the latter is recognised by, for example, sharing collective intelligence, user-generated content and a publish then filter mentality (Jenkins 2006b; Shirky 2008). Thus, the logic of convergence culture can be seen as the opposite of the logic of broadcasting in Western European nation states. As Moe (2008) suggests, broadcast media used to be characterised as impersonal as well as one-to-many and one-way communication. Broadcast media was organised as “[...] a national hub of power, and important informational, educational and cultural content could be disseminated to all citizens in modernizing states simultaneously, thus contributing to the project of Enlightenment” (p. 322). The shift to implied convergence culture is, according to Jenkins (2006b:243), “[...] a move from medium-specific-content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, [...] toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture.” Thus, we can talk about two colliding fields, to use the term coined by Bourdieu (2000), which are set up by their own discourses, rules, values, norms, reasoning, presumptions and ways of understanding that build up the logic or doxa (ibid.) of each field.

In this chapter, we will look more specifically at how Swedish television, with its long tradition in public service broadcasting, chooses to position itself between these two intersecting fields when entering the blogosphere, in this case through the production of the drama blog Vilma.se, but also how the young audience positions itself in relation to the specific blog at hand.¹

“We Give Them Power”

The expression “public service” comes from the UK and has never been translated into Swedish, but has been interpreted as providing programming in “the service of the general public”. Thus, the term “public service” is used in day-to-day speech. The brand SVT is almost the same as “public service television”, even if there are other channels providing similar services as well. Children’s programmes are one of their flagship productions and the goals for these groups are ambitious, with a strong emphasis on domestic productions covering a number of genres.

Children of preschool age and lower school ages are crucial target groups for SVT, and they constitute a faithful and stable audience. In order to maintain this audience as they grow older, much work has been invested into developing new formats that can fit the young audience’s tastes and preferences better in today’s convergence culture (Jenkins 2006a). One reason for making efforts to maintain a younger audience is that older teenagers tend to prefer a commercial output, both on TV and the web, instead of public service media, a trend that started as soon as commercial television was allowed in the 1980s.

Public service companies face tremendous competition from commercial websites addressing older children: tweens and older teenagers. Stardoll, for example, is based on the concept of a paper doll cut-out clothing game and has about 50 million users in 236 countries (Childs 2011). Thus, one challenge in order to survive in the new merchandised kid’s culture is to create series that are appealing, not only in comparison to other commercial TV productions, but in comparison to other kinds of Internet services as well, such as YouTube, Facebook and gaming in general.

SVTi (Swedish television interactive) is continuously developing its website (svt.se/barn) for children. In its most updated strategy document, SVTi focuses on the underlying idea that a bottom-up perspective is of primary concern. In other words, they should develop ideas from children’s own fantasy worlds, preferences and knowledge. According to Sara Ohlsson (interview with project leader Sara Ohlsson in Ditt SVT 2011):

[...] all children are important, we include them all, regardless of their needs and skills. We listen and face their needs in relation to how they feel, what they think and wonder about, what they like and what they are afraid of.

We give them power when they feel that they can decide, when the site responds to them.

A crucial idea is to build relations with the audience. High priority is given to: “[...] communication between SVT and its audience, instead of communication between users and to always provide a fast and straightforward response, seen from the users’ interests and skills.” In summary, svt.se/barn should be the most popular site in 2012 and children will love it because: “[...] we are magic, we are working for them, we build relations, we give them power, we know all children are important” (Ditt SVT 2011 and presentation at seminar 2011). One genre resulting from the above-mentioned strategic devices is the drama blog, e.g. Vilma.se, which exemplifies how public service i) becomes a social medium, ii) uses previously existing social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, and iii) tries to increase its involvement through participation and personal communicative style.

The Drama Blog Vilma.se

Childs (2011) claims that interactive drama has a strong pull on a teenage audience, and one successful example of this genre is *Sophia's Diary*, which ran on BEBO.² The idea of developing a story about the daily life of a teenage girl has had many followers in various countries and public service versions were also produced, e.g. in Norway. The series *Sara and Mia* became a success in Norway and, according to SVT, this Norwegian version worked as a model to help develop the Swedish social drama blog Vilma.se.

According to Childs (2011:38), interactive drama offers the audience a much deeper engagement than its linear counterpart, because it allows them to share comments, recommend it to their friends, vote and, in some cases, influence the outcomes of the story – all of which are central features of the logic of convergence culture. As will be seen later, involvement was a key element in the production of Vilma.se. The drama blog is an example of transmedia storytelling, which takes place across multiple platforms and formats (Bolin 2008). Thus, the “reader” can enter the main storyline from different entry points. This type of narrative can be compared with cross-media production, where, usually, the same content is seen in various media. As for the former type of narrative, the challenge is to produce a specific content that fits the logic of each medium and, at the same time, coordinates them (Jenkins 2006b). In a digital environment, new types of narratives are being developed, and Murray (1999:271) talks about the emerging cyberdrama, pointing out the future needs of the young generation, “[...] it will take participatory form for granted and will look for ways to participate in ever more subtle and expressive stories.”

The drama Vilma.se (see Figure 1) is about a teenage girl's daily life. It focuses on both the small and big incidents children encounter at school, at home and with their peers. It was launched in March 2010 and was shut down by the end of June 2011. The blog's target group was girls aged from 12 to 15. The story, in brief, focused on the main character, Vilma, who starts a music band with her three friends (Vanessa, Josef and Elias). She comes from a white middle-class family background and lives in a middle-sized city in the southern part of Sweden. The audience could follow the drama by taking part in Vilma's personal blog (with a video diary, photos and brief notes on events happening in Vilma's life). Furthermore, short weekly episodes (two per week) were broadcasted on television (on the channel SVTB) as well as on the blog. Vilma was also on Facebook and "Bilddagboken" (a Swedish website for young people, today called Dayviews) with the aim to get young people interested in her blog (see Social media as a marketing tool, below, for further discussion).

Figure 1. The Drama Blog of Vilma. (www.vilma.se)



The story mainly focuses on Vilma's relationships affairs with different boys and her ambitions of becoming a musician, but it also deals with family problems, such as her parents getting divorced. The above-mentioned topics are generally

also of interest to young female bloggers in real life – focusing on themselves, their friends, boyfriends or family members (Mazur & Kozarian 2010).

With Vilma.se, the producers aimed to create a role model for girls which could serve as an inspiration for them to get involved in some kind of leisure activity. The chief editor of the blog stated:

It's also about the public service value, as a contrast to Kissies³, who isn't working with public service values, to give them that too. To encourage people to develop their potential, trying to show that it is possible. [...] to become a role model, that one can actually succeed. The band is going one step further, but it's still about Vilma. You can take part of how she writes the lyrics to the song and how that develops with time. Then teenagers might feel that they can do the same things as her (Interview with the blog's chief editor).

Social Media as a Marketing Tool

The use of popular social media like YouTube and Facebook, including the use of a blog, to tell the story of Vilma forces SVT to tackle a number of challenges that are related to the logic of convergence culture. It is obvious that the brand SVT encounters new challenges in terms of marketing on the net. For the chief editor of the blog, at present, it is about finding ad hoc solutions and trying out new things, but he stresses that, at the same time, an overall strategy in how to use social media to target certain groups is needed, which is currently missing:

Yes, I don't think we get enough support in that. I have asked for more support, but I have not been able to talk to someone who is really committed on another level. [...] There is a lot of testing to do now. When we started with Vilma I had not really used Dayviews at all, but I have tested it myself. And also whether you can use it as a marketing tool, since it is build up in order for private individuals to be able to talk to each other, or rather their friends.

The idea with transmedia productions is that these are marketed, or just found, on sites teenagers normally visit, such as Facebook. But what actually happens when public service media producers make use of social network sites like Facebook? This is a site mainly used by teens for self-presentation and peer sociality, but also negotiating adult society (boyd 2008). To have a Facebook account is not enough, the company must also carry out systematic research on net usage, to learn about competitors etc. Thus, thorough planning is required if a company is to get increased attention in today's media flow (Waters et al. 2009). Other problems with using social media as a marketing tool are connected to the inherent consumer orientation of these types of media.

As Childs (2011:38) points out, children here repeatedly encounter commercial interests: "But their association with sites frequented every minute of every day by teens ensures that the brands will cut through the cyber-babble and make an impact." In other words, SVT will, by carrying out such marketing strategies, inevitably be connected with commercial interests, which may be in direct contravention of public service ideals.

However, it appeared that social media seemed to have little marketing value in the case of Vilma.se. Participation on social media sites such as Facebook, Bilddagboken (Dayviews) and Twitter was rather limited. For example, on Facebook, 1,621 people pressed the "like" button, but not much new material was found in addition to the blog, mainly photos. The main function of social media was to serve as a navigating tool to guide the users to the blog itself. The network sites were also used to release hits from Vilma's band "Never let you go" or create PR for a live concert with the band. Even if some of the photos received over 350 comments on Bilddagboken (Dayviews), Vilma chose to be silent and did not respond, which does not go hand in hand with teenagers' expectations of social media. Recent research on social media and PR emphasises that it is not about expressing one's message, but, rather, to adjust it to various forums and its logic. Successful relationships are built on trust, requiring companies to carefully listen and respond to what other participants on a forum have to say (Solis & Breakenridge 2010). As we will see later, trust and authenticity became key issues for the young people we interviewed when evaluating the drama blog.

Creating a Personal Communicative Style

The joint ambition of the producers and web producers was to create involvement through a perceived two-way, conversational style of communication, a reciprocal meeting place, by means of a drama-based social blog and transmedia storytelling. To associate the story of Vilma and her friends to one's own personal situation by producing a realistic and plausible emotional situation becomes an example of emotional realism (Barker & Andre 1996), which, in turn, leads to identification with the story and Vilma. SVT's aim, to create a sense of intimacy between the spectator and performer, is far from a new strategy among media producers, and was already discussed in the classical work of Horton and Wohl (1956), when the audience makes "para-social" relationships with television characters:

The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. [...] The persona

offers, above all, a continuing relationship. His appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life (Horton & Wohl 1956:215).

The drama blog tries to create a kind of social relationship with its users by addressing them through a personal communicative style. Vilma is portrayed as an ordinary girl who is accessible and sociable in relation to her audience, who are addressed as Vilma's "friends". As we will see, the construction of the audience as friends has implications for how children perceive Vilma, how they identify with her and their expectations/involvement with the site. Vilma's friends have, for example, the opportunity to comment on her videos etc., but they can also give advice about certain things. For instance, should she leave the band, should she break up with her boyfriend – this is how Vilma's friends can influence the story and what will happen. We can see how the producers of Vilma.se mix the boundaries between private and public worlds, but also between the amateur and the profession distinction by making use of simple webcam recordings from Vilma's bedroom. Below is transcription of a video clip where Vilma shares her thoughts about staying with her father after her parents' divorce. Over time, this might, in turn, form an experience of intimacy with the audience, where Vilma opens up and reveals things about herself on the blog, thus letting us have a glimpse backstage (Goffman 1959; Giddens 1992).

Hi,
 Yes, it has been okay staying here with my dad. Really okay. I do not feel alone anymore, not at all. Well, yesterday we talked and dad asked me if I wanted to stay a few days extra and see what it was like and go to school when I am staying with him. He said that it will not be as hard as I think. Linn also agreed, so I think I'll try. I don't exactly have anything to lose, but I think it will work out great. Have a good one.

This informal mode of addressing the audience is similar to what Norman Fairclough (1995:13) labels a conversationalisation discourse, which has come to permeate the accelerating marketization of media output in the attempt to increase audience appeal. Or what Paddy Scannell, in the late 1980s, labelled "the communicative ethos of broadcasting" (1989:152), which he defined as "[...] relaxed and spontaneous modes of address and forms of talks".

Fairclough raises the question "[...] do conversationalized discourse practices manifest a real shift in power relations in favour of ordinary people, or are they to be seen as merely a strategy on the part of those with power to more effectively recruit people as audiences and manipulate them socially and politically?" (1995:13). Entering the blogosphere makes the conversationalization discourse even more salient than before (i.e. in the logic of broadcasting),

as the producer, in the case of Vilma.se, is constructing a fictional conversation by addressing the audience directly as if pure two-way communication is possible. This strategy and ideology of fusing the borders between the public and the private sphere is drawn to its edge in the time of web 2.0. Making use of common media forms in young people's day-to-day communication implies an increasing need to have knowledge about the various linguistic and ethical features of computer-mediated communication and the meanings attached to these mediated practices. Ways of expressing oneself within a community are shaped by the relationship between communicators, norms, purpose and the participants' characteristics (Hård af Segerstad 2002). Thus, it's a challenge for producers to develop and find the proper "speech genre" (Bakhtin 1986) for a certain target group. Bakhtin's notion of speech genres implies that people learn how to use language in various contexts; previous actors within a certain context have developed certain routines for communication. In a similar manner, the Internet has developed specific codes and routines for communication for its various platforms. Hence, the blogosphere can be seen as an example of a particular speech genre, which means that SVT has to face new challenges.

"Vilma, Why Don't You Reply?"

In order to study how children experienced Vilma.se, an expert panel made up of children was set up. The interactive elements of this production, such as the blog, were of particular focus. While it is clearly stated on the blog that the audience can affect the storyline, this has not, however, worked in reality. The producers mentioned the difficulties with this approach in terms of the necessary time and planning required to produce the weekly TV episodes. Thus, it can be rather tricky for a media company to comply with the logic of convergence culture and its specific forms of communication, which can have pitfalls when facing the audience. This format is even more pronounced when "real" talk is possible, as is the case with blogs. However, by using a familiar format of "real" talk in the blogs, the youngsters may have other expectations in terms of, for example, expecting fast feedback on their comments. According to the young interviewees in our expert panel, these expectations were not fulfilled on Vilma.se. In other words, SVT does not follow the logic of personal blogging as the youngsters know it (e.g. Kissies.se). And if there is a specific logic (shaped by technological, institutional and cultural factors) associated with a drama blog, these children are not yet familiar with it.

According to the project manager in charge of SVT's web for children, a decision was made not to give frequent responses to audience comments. Such a decision indicates that the blog is to be read as a fictional one. But, as will be seen later, the conversational style of communication on the blog makes it

rather difficult for the interviewed children to see the fictional context of the story. The logic of “real” blogs still prevails among the young and they have certain expectations when using Vilma.se. For example, lack of feedback led to the audience being less interested in the blog:

- Something that is strange is the fact that she does not respond to the comments. Then maybe the audience will become more grumpy. You want an answer; it’s no fun when she does not answer.
- This would have been much better if she had answered.
- For example, you can upload your song – but then she’s not doing it.

Thus, in terms of the function of comments, the logic of broadcasting prevails in terms of dissemination rather than dialogue (Durham Peters 1999). But, despite the criticism the transmedia storytelling appealed to the young interviewees. What appealed to them was the fact that they could follow Vilma in her daily life whenever they wanted to and view her video clips and written notes to gain an insight into her thoughts and feelings in addition to the weekly TV episodes. Thus, much more happens on the blog compared with an ordinary television drama. The use of visual communication rather than written language was appreciated, as one interviewee stated: “When reading such a long text it’s hard work to read it all, you look at the pictures instead. It’s much better to watch a video.” Discussing the themes of the drama blog, the young interviewees agreed that it concerned issues of relevance to girls their own age, i.e. a kind of identification:

- So, maybe it’s the same for a person whose parents have just divorced, it’s the same, you know. Some people might think that it’s nice to talk to her and so on.

To be able to hear her thoughts about something?

- Well, you know that you are not on your own because that may be very difficult. (Interview with a 12-year-old girl).

In the excerpt above, the words “talk to her” illustrate the idea of a supportive audience. This idea is based on the premise that Vilma is regarded as a real person, and not an actor, with whom the audience has established an emotional relationship.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note how a comment posted on Vilma.se does not result in much feedback or response from other audience members. It’s as if they did not exist, which may be partly due to fact that the audience is constructed as a personal friend to Vilma rather than, for example, a fan community, where the dialogue between audience members is vital. The site did not encourage this type of community building, which is, as has been pre-

viously discussed, an intentional and strategic decision by the producers. But it may also be due to various modes of interpretational stances.

Modes of Interpretational Stances: A Fabricated Reality

The construction of a fabricated reality may make the audience get involved in and engaged with a storyline, but the audience might also be provoked and become critical when it discovers that it is all “fake”. If the fictional context of the production is not clear enough, the audience may feel tricked and hurt when they realise that things are not as they seemed. This, in turn, might have consequences on their future relations with a brand or media company. To be competitive in today’s media landscape means to gain the “emotional capital” of the audience, where “trademark” is replaced by a so-called “lovemark”. For the latter, the establishment of loyalty becomes a key point (Jenkins 2006b). A sign of this is SVT’s strategy of being “magic”, a buzzword they use both for children and adults in their branding work. Such obvious branding strategies of creating an “image” may become even more crucial for public service companies that are prohibited to act on the market on the same financial terms as their commercial competitors (Strömbäck & Jönsson 2007).

According to Jenkins (2006b), the ongoing paradigm shift to a convergence culture will imply that different ethical codes and social contracts are established, and these will have consequences not only for the media industry, but also for citizens and consumers. In the end, this shift will affect how we socially relate to others. Among other things, the concept of what is real or fake can be a case of a “social contract”. In the group interviews with the young teenagers, the question of realism and trust became a key issue. The website states that Vilma.se is a fictional drama blog, albeit in the background. By clicking on a link, visitors to the blog can read the following statement:

Vilma is a drama series made by Swedish Television, where you can follow Vilma and her bandmates Vanessa, Josef and Elias here on her blog every day of the week. The series is fiction and the participants in the series are actors.

However, the interviewees in the project stated that they did not take particular notice of this link and did not bother to click further to find out more information about the site. As one of the girls interviewed stated: “Usually I do not study a website, I do not usually look to find out what it is, I just go straight in to see what it is.” Children had also rather limited knowledge of SVT and public services. The young interviewees relied on their expectation that behind a blog you will find an authentic person, in this case Vilma, as both a character and private person. The audience expected to meet the real

Vilma and they thought that they could go “backstage” to meet her and get to know her better. This touches upon the central issue of reality and fantasy in media studies and whether children can tell the difference (e.g. Rydin 1996; Messenger Davies 2008). Children in this particular target group, so-called “tweens”, normally master the codes of fantasy and reality in conventional media presentations, but virtual modes of presenting “a reality”, as in this case, might not yet be fully understood as the implicit codes and expectations are apparently different. Children’s and young people’s beliefs about blogs seem to rely on the assumption that they are written by people that exist in real life who share their real-life experiences (Muratore 2008).

The interviewees raised questions of what speech genre Vilma represented. They felt that the language used on Vilma.se was similar, but also different compared to girls’ written language and means of expressing themselves with so-called emoticons (e.g. ☺, ☹, ;-), *smiles*) to express mood and feelings:

– I do not think that a girl of our age has written it.

In what way?

– We are more careless when we write, an adult does not do that.

You say careless, what would you ... how would you write it then?

– We shorten the words. You skip words that would be together in a sentence and stuff like that.

So it is more of a chat language?

– Yes. This sounds like a young person: “couldn’t be bothered to do it now”. But there was something: “you must be really tired of me” if you had removed “shit, you must be tired of me”, I would not have written it like that.

You would not have written shit?

– Well, not “you must be tired of me”, it sounds a little older.

Consequently, the question “Vilma, who are you?” was raised by the young participants in our project and led to many critical discussions about the blog, such as:

– I first thought that SVT sponsored Vilma’s blog.

– It doesn’t feel safe anymore. It’s not a good site.

– It’s not fun; it’s boring when I found out that it’s not for real.

– You feel fooled. If you find out about it you can get really pissed off, and not want to visit the blog anymore.

– It should be more clear who the producers are. But then Vilma won’t be the same.

- People who write comments see Vilma as a friend.
- Everybody will be sad when the blog shuts down. They think she is real.

These types of statements are confirmed when looking at the 119 comments Vilma received after her last update “Nu är det slut!” (“Ending the blog”, 21 June 2011). The comments were directed to Vilma as a friend, not to the producers or the actors, i.e. the backstage production staff.

- No, (please don’t stop blogging you’re really shitty then :(
- Bye.
- Vilma I will miss you ☺☺, hope we will perhaps bump into each other one day in Malmö, your blog was cool, but ,yes, (goodbye) and☺
- Oh, I have followed your blog ever since it was started. I LOVE YOU. I will never forget you. ☺Perhaps we can meet one day? ☺Take care!

The comments above seem to reflect a personal relationship with Vilma, but there is also an eagerness to meet her face to face. While there are comments on the blog which try to tell others that it is all fake, these are completely ignored and do not get any responses from the audience.

For those interviewees who initially started to watch and take part of Vilma’s blog in the belief that they were in touch with a real person, the involvement with the blog changed immediately after they realised that it was purely fictional. They were no longer interested in being friends with Vilma on Bilddagboken (Dayviews) and Facebook as they didn’t enjoy the blog anymore. It was obvious that the contract was broken: “It feels weird to comment on a person who is not alive, who does not exist, who is not who she says she is. It feels weird and corny to write to someone who does not exist” (12-year-old girl).

As for the children who knew from the beginning that it was a drama with actors, they were still puzzled by the fact that she is not the one who, for example, writes the blog and makes her own video clips (compared with the short TV episodes). During the group interviews, several children asked questions which were aimed at finding something out about Vilma that was genuine. Isn’t Vilma her real name? Doesn’t Vilma live in Lund? Hasn’t she written the song herself? Thus, the stance “is the story true or not” prevailed. Such questions and confusion indicated that the border between reality and fiction was not always clear and easy to handle. Vilma’s frequent presence on social networks like Facebook made it even more confusing for them: “It may well be that we think that (that she is real) because she is in so many places. She is not just on the blog or TV, but she can be found at lots of different locations.”

Blurring the border between fiction and reality was not seen as an ethical dilemma for the producers. But the audience reacted to it as if it was a prob-

lem, which could even lead to the audience having less trust in the value of this kind of interaction. Besides the interpretational mode “Are you real?”, the opinion that “Vilma actually is a real person” could be discerned in the interviews. Each different stance can be said to form its own bargain (Shirky 2008) between the producer and the participant, which, in turn, has implications on the interpretational frame put in use. An important remark by Shirky is that this type of contract may not only be explicit, i.e. following the official guidelines of a site concerning, for example, ethics on the net, but also implicit, between users, producers or among the participants themselves.

The editors clearly stated that the audience was informed on the blog that Vilma is a production by SVT, and they have, for example, decided not to give much feedback on the comments to Vilma. Taking this measure should be a hint to the audience that the blog is fictional rather than factual. But, as we have seen, our young interviewees did not pay much attention to the information provided about the drama blog. With Vilma.se, the producers were blurring the border of reality and fiction to create involvement in the story of Vilma and her life. Thus, SVT aimed to create the “pretend that it is real” mode of interpretation and involvement through transmedia storytelling (cf. Denward 2011), as discussed above. The editor of the blog stated:

- On the blog we haven’t tried to hide it as you can read that it is a blog drama from SVT and then you can click on the link and read about it, that they are all actors. It has never been the ambition to hide this, but of course we have decided not to place this text on the front page of the site.

But isn’t it difficult for children to understand that it is a drama blog?

- Absolutely, but at the same time we don’t want to break that illusion, so they can get involved with the character and not the actress.

But for young teenagers trust was important and had implications regarding their attitudes to the drama. All of a sudden, they realised that Vilma was not real but just an actor in a social drama blog. Obviously, authenticity and trust are two key elements in the children’s evaluation of a site based on the contract “Vilma is a real person”, which, in turn, can be related to the amount of emotional capital the audience is prepared to invest in a media product/brand and affect its lovemarks. They will not be fooled, which can be related to their general awareness of potential risks (like paedophiles, bullying) with the net.

However, others would state that it is just a matter of time before children learn “to read” this type of genre and its mode of involvement and “pretend that it is real”, i.e. to get accustomed to its logic, as they are becoming more media literate. In the discussions with the young interviewees, one can see how they are looking at various criteria when they try to decide whether the blog is real or not, in terms of, for example, private/public, but also about finding

out who Vilma's friends are on Facebook:

Maybe, I do not think I would write that (in that way). On my blog, I have lots of friends who read my blog. Vilma's friends are not active on her blog. Her friends do not read her blog. You don't write about all your problems in RL because then your friends would read it on the blog. You don't want to write anything stupid on the blog, since your friends can read it. (12-year-old girl).

However, critics would state that the drama blog is an example of how a media company manipulates children's feelings and conceptions of the world in a desperate struggle to get the attention of the "lost young audience", where the audience-as-market prevails (cf. Ang 1991).

Public Service at the Crossroads

Ian Ang (1991:26) has contributed with a now well-known discussion on the institution-audience relationship where she highlighted differences between the audience-as-market and the audience-as-public, stating: "[...] although all broadcasting institutions must, by definition, imagine the audience as an object to be conquered, the meaning, intent or import of the conquest is not construed in the same way in the two systems." In the latter system, the audience is to be approached as citizens, rather than consumers, who need to be "reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained [...] to better perform their democratic rights and duties" (Ang 1991:28). This discussion is also very relevant in today's media landscape, which is informed by various Internet services. This chapter has looked particularly at how SVT addresses the young audience in the blogosphere era through the drama blog Vilma.se. There is no doubt that being situated in a digital media landscape, featured increasingly by a convergence culture rather than the logic of broadcasting, has its challenges. It is, of course, not a matter of a pure dichotomy between the paradigm of broadcasting and convergence culture, but a shift is taking place, forcing media companies to face ongoing challenges with new formats and ways of knowing, addressing and constructing the young audience. Vilma.se exemplifies how public service i) becomes a social medium, ii) uses previously existing social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, and iii) tries to increase its involvement through participation and personal communicative style. But, perhaps, even more importantly, this shift is linked to institutional reflexivity (Giddens 1991), where a media company with aspirations of having a share of the future market is forced to examine and reflect upon its own self-image, previous knowledge, traditions, habits, daily practices and organisational set-up. According to the logic of a convergence culture, such reflections become vital and necessary,

and we can see an accentuated tension between professionalism and amateur culture. The latter features characteristics such as sharing, collective intelligence, user-generated content and a publish then filter mentality (Shirky 2008). This reflexivity can be seen at SVT in, for example, how they have changed their way of working with young audiences; increasingly relying on ethnographic methods in order to meet young people's needs in daily settings; listening to what children have to say; and in their curiosity to try out new formats, such as the drama blog, which shifts SVT's focus from the traditional television format to other forms of production.

With Vilma.se, SVT aimed to position itself in the blogosphere era in order to reach girls aged 12 to 15. According to SVT, a performed reality is a trigger to involve the audience, where the story of Vilma is told as a television drama, a blog, but also on other social media, such as Facebook. Looking more carefully at the story, we can discern how it is embedded in three layers – drama, fictionalised reality and reality (cf. Denward 2011). Layers which, in turn, can be seen as a combination of playing with truth, intimacy, relations and entertainment, with the main aim of creating involvement through a type of virtual capsularisation (cf. De Cauter 2006); to catch and keep the audience; constantly surrounded by various competitive media flows. A so-called capsular involvement, which can be labelled as synthetic personalisation through web 2.0 tools (cf. Fairclough 1989). In the production of Vilma.se, a simulation of a personal relationship is put to the forefront between written, audiovisual elements, graphical design and the audience. The use of a conversationalization discourse for strategic purposes is, of course, not a new phenomenon. This type of framing on a blog through transmedia storytelling evokes additional forms of expressions and meaning-making processes, but also certain beliefs and expectations from the young audience, who meet the drama blog with their own genre horizons, interpretative framework (cf. Potter & Wetherell 1987) and speech genres (Bakhtin 1986) for verbal articulation on the blog, including principles of realism, trust and authenticity. Here, the expectations of the audience, i.e. their interpretative frames, do not always go hand in hand with SVT's ambitions of positioning itself in the blogosphere between the fields of logic of broadcasting and the logic of convergence culture.

Vilma.se also exemplifies how SVT tries to make use of various mediated networks, such as Facebook, as here it can reach young people and raise their interest in public service media content. However, this move by SVT to explore the possibilities of commercial sites and enter the market economy of the Internet is problematic. Besides the young audience's specific expectations and usage of these types of social networks, one may assert that public service, with its non-commercial values, should not use these types of web pages. In fact, they stimulate children to be part of a commodity strategy, as there are commercial imperatives underneath the free online content and com-

munication – to sell advertisements (Fuchs 2009), which encourages children to consume. Critics are here referring to the Swedish regulation of public service, which states that inappropriate favouring of commercial interests is not allowed (Tetzell 2010). Furthermore, public service companies face additional ethical dilemmas in their new ways of addressing the young audience. By using Facebook, media companies might gain access to what one's friends on the network discuss and how they express themselves. Thus, Facebook may be used as a panoptic system of audience surveillance as information is gained without approval from the children (cf. Mathiesen 1997).

However, digital platforms related to social media, such as Facebook, are deliberately widely used as a tool and service for communication in many other non-commercial settings than public service media, such as official authorities, schools, universities etc. So why should a non-profit media company have a more restricted policy than others? The Internet is a marketplace which opens up its doors as soon as you start surfing. One general argument favouring the digitalisation of public media concerns the issue of diversity. Broadcasters' online activities may offer platforms where many different audiences and user groups are exposed to a wide range of ideas, services and communities. For example, comprehensive public portals may facilitate the representation of specific minority audience needs. A mediated platform where users can be visible and less mysterious to the institution and to each other; having the potential for public service to engage viewers and listeners as citizens and participants rather than just audiences (Debrett 2010). However, shifting from public broadcasting to public media in the age of convergence culture, the strategic words of SVT, such as "we are for them", "we build relations", "we give them power", are given another meaning compared with the era of traditional broadcasting. According to Fairclough, the democratic values of conversationalized discursive practices is not self-evident and "[...] might be regarded not as eradicating the power of producers, professionals, bureaucrats, and so forth, but as backgrounding and disguising it, and making it more difficult to challenge" (1994:264).

Notes

1. An expert panel of 30 12-year-old children was formed. This panel was interviewed a number of times during 2010 and 2011. Group discussions, led by one of the researchers in the project, were set up and were tape-recorded and transcribed. These discussions took place in front of a computer, where the site Vilma.se and other sites could be commented on and analysed by the children. Each group consisted of 3–4 participants at a time and semi-structured interview guides were used.
2. Bebo is a social networking website launched in July 2005. [...] The website's name is an acronym for 'Blog Early, Blog Often'. Users receive a personal profile page where they can post blogs, photographs, music, videos and questionnaires to which other users may answer. Additionally, users may add others as friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Bebo is very similar to other social

- networking sites, mainly Facebook and MySpace (Quoted from Wikipedia, 10/1/12).
3. "Kissie" started her blog in January 2007, and the blog is currently the most visited blog in Sweden, with approximately 107,000 visitors and features Kissie's personal life. The Swedish blogger is known for liking to provoke people (Quoted from Wikipedia, 18/11/11).

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Cross-media Production Networks

Comparing Organizations in Public Service Broadcasting Programmes

María Isabel Villa

Different theoretical approaches to studies of television development emphasize that the increased number of distribution systems, and the emergence of new institutionalized or informal forms of broadcasting, have given rise to new ways of understanding television. Accordingly, television companies cannot simply be understood as industries broadcasting an audiovisual signal to a specific geographically-defined area, bound by a public or private structure (Uricchio 1999). There is instead a need to look beyond the transmission model that so profoundly has conditioned professional thought within broadcasting, because Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) has been transformed into Public Service Media (Ferrell and Bardoel 2007).

Mediatisation has become one of the core concepts to describe the present changes. As suggested by Hepp *et al.* (2008), we can no longer view media as separate units, but must develop an understanding of how the increasing spread of media communication develops new interconnections and interdependencies. From such a perspective, television, radio and the press have acquired a wider and more variable meaning since they are no longer limited to the physical and material dimension of the apparatus that was previously used for transmission (Bechmann-Petersen 2006). This expansion, or ability to propagate content across diverse types of media, denotes a symbolic change in the ways we understand formats or modalities, which according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) constitutes an important development for the media community by awarding enhanced media provisions. Following the characteristics of mediatisation described by Krotz (2008), it is possible to understand the changes in television as a process involving:

1. More complex media systems due to the large number of devices available to receive audiovisual signals.
2. Transformation of the functions of television from a social, economic and cultural point of view.

3. Wider presence of television in current life. Watching television is currently a completely different experience to what it was in past decades.
4. Alteration of the communication system. Due to the interactive, multimedia and hypertext possibilities of digital media, audiences play an active role. Recipients have become participants and television industries must develop new ways to integrate user generated content in their offers.

Hence, one of the primary challenges that public service broadcasting has to address is derived from the abundance of media, or the coexistence of multiple content-delivery platforms. To meet this challenge, broadcasters need to find ways to redefine the division of labour for carrying out production practices (Bechmann Petersen 2006). These may include new possibilities for fostering cooperation between workers – sometimes making spatial changes in order to integrate different media work processes, and/or incorporating online work systems to facilitate the incessant transfer of information (Villa 2010).

A large body of the theoretical discourse on cross-media production and television draws heavily on the rationalist school of thought, and is mainly interested in finding a unified production model that promises substantial benefits. To begin with, researchers like Jeffery-Poulter (2002) focused on developing a typology to establish the characteristics that digital productions need to exhibit and formulate a “Decalogue”, consisting of the obligations that multiplatform television needs to abide by in order to generate interactive and hypertextual content.

Scholars analysing media convergence according to functionalist and positivist paradigms tend to align with the assumption that there is a hypothesized truth, or rigid formula of strategies to be applied. However, empirical investigation shows that most of these theory-based formulas and “hypothetical truths” fall short when put into practice; they cannot be implemented because the reality of the field is much more complex and context-specific than what the theories are able to encompass (Küng-Shankleman 2007).

This investigation breaks away from this view and takes a different approach to the problem. We do not intend to provide definite answers to the tensions that inevitably occur in a cross-media environment, nor do we attempt to abridge the complexity of the dynamics involved. Rather, we are interested in examining the inter-relationship between actors during the production of cross-media television content. The aim of this research is to find out how the production practices are designed and redesigned in order for each programme to fit the changes in context, to study the similarities and differences between them, and to compare the advantages and disadvantages of each organization.

Following the suggestions by Küng-Shankleman (2007), our view is in line with interpretative and evolutionary conceptualisations for the analysis of organisational practices. This perspective enables both an objective and subjective

understanding of the production in a constantly-changing environment. We consider this approach to be particularly beneficial during this initial stage of cross-media production. Moving from theorisation to attempting to understand current work practices through tangible data compiled in the field can significantly add to our knowledge of the organizational practice required, which we are still considerably far from achieving.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted on four programmes produced by the public broadcaster in Catalonia, *Televisió de Catalunya* (TVC), this study looks at the relations between production practices for television, the Internet and mobile phones. In order to holistically understand the interaction between workers and digital technology we use Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This approach from the field of science and technology studies is effective in this case for examining the conditions of production practices as a functional network. ANT is suitable for observing the complex connections between human and nonhuman actors and for evaluating the actors' mutual dynamics, associations or interactions in everyday work.

By incorporating different variables such as: the configuration of groups, coordination systems, work flows and levels of association this study identifies three different networks, which we have called concentrated, mixed and dispersed depending on the relationship between their actors. So our findings suggest that there is no unified cross-media production system, but rather that there are various and constantly-changing ones in accordance with the configurations and circumstances implicated in each network.¹

Cross-media Production as a Dynamic Fortuitous Network

Actor-Network Theory explores the process of association and its logic. Far from technological determinist approaches, ANT proposes the elimination of the pure essence of subjects or objects. Instead, this perspective invites us to look closer at the mediating role of techniques, because neither subjects nor objects are pure or fixed.

Technical mediation between subject and object is clearly exposed by Latour (1994) with the simple example of the use of guns. Some believe that guns kill people and some believe that people kill people, not guns. This example shows the opposition between materialism and the sociological version of the technological mediation. In contrast, ANT claims that neither of both positions is totally true given that the mediatisation process changes the actions of both men and guns. Action is performed following the goals of translation, a term which deals with "displacement, drift, invention, mediation, the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies two elements of agents" (Latour 1994:32). As the author suggests, we are different with a gun

in our hand and a gun is different when we hold it, therefore this transformation or force of translation is symmetrical. So, ANT questions perspectives that analyse technology as a static entity. In order to push the research forward, Latour suggests we start by breaking down the barriers between subjects and objects, because it is impossible for an object to emerge without social intervention and it is extremely difficult for social interaction to exist without objects.

Actor-Network Theory has often been applied in media studies, specifically in empirical research of the innovations of digital journalism (e.g. Hemmingway 2008; Plesner 2009; Schmitz Weiss and Domingo 2010). The difficulty to see what is happening in detail in a newsroom, when everything we see is moving and nothing remains constant, makes ANT useful for the study of media production practices (Hemmingway 2008). Schmitz Weiss and Domingo argue that the ANT approach...

...can be especially beneficial to trace the power relationships between the different actors involved in the development of an innovation in a newsroom, the conflicts around the definition of a technology and the process of reaching closure, including technical artefacts as another actor in the equation (Schmitz Weiss and Domingo (2010:2).

The research interest in ANT as a framework for analysing the relation between new technologies and journalistic practices seems to be taking an alternative perspective, that captures the heterogeneity of actors (human and nonhuman) and their possible associations as equally important elements of analysis (Plesner 2009). Particularly, Actor-Network Theory, in this case, provides the tools to study a network of multiple actors undergoing constant transformation and thus permanent recreation; this is precisely one of the major challenges that a researcher faces when analysing cross-media production. It is impossible to fully grasp the fabric of the actors participating in the network because in every attempt to reach stability, the network opens up to encompass more actors, which results in a constant expansion of the system.

As well as the lack of clarity available regarding the boundaries of the networks in working practices, it is important to also consider that every social analysis constantly recalls, eliminates, separates, and reunites social aggregates (Latour 1999). Therefore, we use ANT as a way of “travelling” from one point to another, from one sector of the organization to another, from the professionals to the machinery they use. As Latour suggests, social research imitates the way a mapmaker draws a path; the mapmaker must stay clear from conveying anything beyond the tangible and the observable.

We assume that production practices are not transparent and that the actors participating in their development are not always aware of all the practical aspects entailed; so production practices do not imply that the actors have full control over the same. Conversely, when applying ANT, we can view

production as a knot, a node, and a conglomerate of various unpredictable agencies that need to be carefully unravelled. The relation between the actors in our networks is delimited by the action; the problem lies in the fact that the actions not only happen, but also modify the processes, i.e., every time a new actor enters an activity, this intervention generates transformations. The researcher then needs to examine what underlies the transformation and what the transformation consists of.

The Empirical Basis

In order to examine the inter-relationship between groups during the elaboration of cross-media content and illustrate the use of this theoretical framework in the study of cross-media practices in PSB, we conducted empirical research into *Televisió de Catalunya* (TVC), a public regional broadcaster in Catalonia controlled by Spain's autonomous community and part of the Catalan Corporation of Audiovisual Media (*Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals*, CCMA).

TVC is a representative example of the digital migration of PSB in Spain (Prado and Fernández-Quijada 2006). TVC has moved ahead of its competitors by designing products that exploit the advantages of digital platforms. TVC was the first broadcaster in Spain to have a website and the first to launch interactive applications for DTT. TVC has also been a pioneer by adopting a video on demand service on the Internet and was the first to deliver audiovisual content for mobile phones in the Iberian Peninsula.

But this organizational evolution does not progress as a single process in a single direction. Each area of the same broadcaster could present different levels of change. Therefore, we examine how cross-media production appears in different audiovisual programmes. In particular, we took as a case study four TVC programmes: Club Super3, 3xl.cat, Loops! and Ritmes.clips, addressed at early childhood and young audiences. These programmes offer timely insights into how traditional PSB are changing their production strategies and developing new networks between different work groups in order to produce cross-media content.

Club Super3 is a social club for children and at the same time a television container programme; this is a concept coined by Wolf (1999) to describe long-duration programmes that include interviews, musical performances and some filmed documentaries or contests, in which the audience plays a central role. Club Super3 is a long-running program on Catalan television. The project started in 1991 with a twofold purpose, on the one hand to offer children the chance to attend different activities and cultural events for free and on the other to develop an audiovisual project to lead the TVC schedule of children programmes. On television, Club Super 3 is composed of gags produced by

TVC that serve as a way of integrating or linking international series. The programme broadcasted on TV3 and K3 until October 2009, when the direction decided to make it a channel for children from zero to fourteen years of age.

The 3xl.cat programme is the first TVC fictional project created from the outset to provide products for both television and the Internet. 3xl.cat is also a container programme and includes reportages and short news stories produced by TVC in order to connect international cartoon and fiction series for young audiences. This project was launched in May 2000, during the expansion of the dot.com industries. By this time, young people were beginning to embrace the Internet as an important means of entertainment in Spain and public broadcasters were offering very little content for this audience. The program ran until May 2008 when TVC decided to suspend its production, but still used the name to link series and films. The uncertainty about the future of the project was resolved in April 2009 through the creation of a new programme called TAGS to cater for the same audience as 3xl.cat and the emergence of a new channel in September 2010, called 3xl.

Loops! and Ritmes.clips are two music programmes addressed at young people. Both of them form part of the ritmes.cat music portal. This is a convergent project that gathers all music-related content provided by the CCMA and has come to include different versions for teletext and mobile phones for the first time since the launch of the website. Loops! was broadcast from February 2005 to December 2008. This programme paid particular attention to Catalan music and sought to explain the complexity of music using accessible language, with a pedagogic profile; whereas the transmission of Ritmes.clips started in May 2004, was suspended in September 2008 and was revived in March 2009, when TVC decided to launch a new space called Ritmes on the channel 33 schedule. Ritmes.clips has become the television window of the ritmes.cat music website. It is therefore the first television programme to be created after the website with which it shares its name rather than vice versa, as was the norm until then.

The study used a dual methodology. On the one hand, it studied the multiplatform offer and on the other hand it examined practices related with the production of multiplatform content. The analysis of the multiplatform offer consisted of comparing and contrasting the ways that each programme embraced the expansive production possibilities available to include Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), the Internet, and mobile phone platforms.

In order to examine the multiplatform offer, we observed transmissions on DTT, teletext services and the interactive applications associated with the television programme. When examining the broadcasts on the Internet, we considered the availability of a website, the possibility of viewing an online video, and the possibility of participating in the programme via the web, i.e. via forums, chats or competitions. In the case of products created for mobile phones, we

studied the possibility of watching an online video of the programme, the opportunity to participate by sending SMS, and also other promotional services such as the possibility of downloading mobile ringtones, which help reinforce the popularity of the brand. Finally, news services are also provided, such as alert tones or newsletters for subscribers. It is important to highlight that this study does not provide an extensible theoretical typification of the multiplatform offer, it represents the “reality” encountered in the particular case of TVC and was used for operationalization purposes.

Following this analysis, in the second phase ethnographic tools were used to identify the characteristics of these multiplatform products. We engaged in participant observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis to compile data, and triangulate findings, which are indicated as adequate research methods for conducting qualitative case studies (Yin 2003).

The observation period lasted 2 months (December 2008-February 2009), and took place in different places and branches of the CCMA, in which cross-media production-related tasks are carried out. The interviews were conducted during two very different phases of the project. The first part of the interviews took place at the beginning, during the elaboration phase of the project, and the second part was conducted during and after the observation period.

We held a total of forty interviews with thirty-seven subjects, given that sometimes the same subject was interviewed twice and even three times during the investigation period. The subjects interviewed were professionals involved in production, and especially professionals in charge of administrative duties, based on the rationale that their experience and knowledge would enable them to draft a global picture of the process in which the tasks were accomplished, and could subsequently provide valuable insights into the research of the overall production practices.

The data collected was analysed from an ANT perspective, which helped interpret cross-media production in PSB. We looked for organizational patterns, differences and similarities in the configuration of groups, coordination systems, production flows and levels of association. Our focus was on two relevant research questions:

RQ1: How are the actors involved in cross-media production associated or linked with each other?

RQ2: How do the staff of different programmes design and redesign cross-media production practices by fitting the changes in context?

Multiplatform Derivation

The diversity involved in the four programmes analysed led to a highly heterogeneous development of multiplatform products. The objectives, the budget and the particular level of evolution of each programme appear to be decisive factors in the elaboration of products to reinforce and expand the mission of each programme. Table 1 depicts the multiplatform products available for each programme. The names of the programmes are abbreviated: Club Super3 is S3; 3xl.cat is 3xl, and Loops! and Ritmes.clips is LyR. The spaces marked in grey indicate the type of platform used to broadcast these products.

Table 1. Offer of Multiplatform Products for the Club Super3, 3xl.cat, Loops! and Ritmes.clips Programmes

Multiplatform products									
	Products for DTT		Products for the Internet			Products for mobile phones			
	Teletext	Interactive	Web site	Online video	Participation	Video	Participation	Promotion	Information
S3									
3x1									
LyR									

In spite of the diversity involved in the development of the products for each programme, we were able to discern general tendencies regarding the use of the platforms. In general, our findings suggest that all programmes have implemented similar multiplatform products. This uniformity is particularly significant for products developed for the Internet, such as web pages, delivery of online video and the incorporation of participation tools for Internet. In the same way, the development of promotional and informative services for mobile phones is similar. However, if we examine this multiplatform offer in depth, our findings show a large number of differences in relation with the manner in which each programme uses the technical potentialities of each media and their position in a cross-media hierarchy.

For example, Club Super3, Loops! and Ritmes.clips have teletext services and these contents are basically informative, but Club Super3 is the only programme that has an exclusive teletext section. Between pages 181 and 189, it is possible to find general information addressed at the members of the club. Teletext exhibits the activities of the club and includes practical information apart from recommended events and activities which require an invitation. On the other hand, Loops! and Ritmes.clips have a shared teletext section called Ritmes.cat from pages 491 to 494. This part is divided into four topics: news, contents, on this day in history and musical launches.

Turning to interactive services on DTT, it is significant how little they are used to enhance the audiovisual contents of the programmes. Only Club Super3 has an interactive game on DTT called Flusky-Clau. This game was released in October 2006 to promote the new characters in the programme, principally Flusky, the half man half cat star of the show. This game of skill requires participants to help Flusky to find the key out of the cartoon world across ten levels. Although this game was created in order to be permanently available on DTT, it is currently only accessible during the transmission of Club Super3, because the multiplex is unable to deliver it while also broadcasting SMS related to the other programme, Els Matins, which illustrates the problems with multiplex management. In line with the findings made by Franquet and Ribes (2010), “the evolution of interactivity in DTT seems aimed at the development and establishment of the incipient services that are created by combining television and Internet connections, so-called *DTTcom*”.

Turning now to the Internet, the study reveals intensive activity. The overall analysis showed that the Internet plays a key role in the multiplatform offer and each programme seems to be adapting to the platform in accordance with its specific needs. The four programmes primarily use Internet as a social network to encourage participation and interaction by the audience, or as an additional platform for consumption other than audiovisual, although videos always appear after they have been transmitted on DTT, which still holds preferential status in the media ecosystem in terms of broadcasting order.

All the online sites researched have incorporated tools for participation. The types of uses vary, the most common being forums, followed by games, competitions, blogs, chats and surveys. This desire to participate in the programmes reveals the need for children to experience the enjoyment more deeply and personally. It is particularly relevant in the case of 3xl's web page, which reached TVC's largest online community of 757,141 registered users in December 2008 and is well-known in Catalonia for having developed the first online game associated with a television programme, called *Espai 8*.

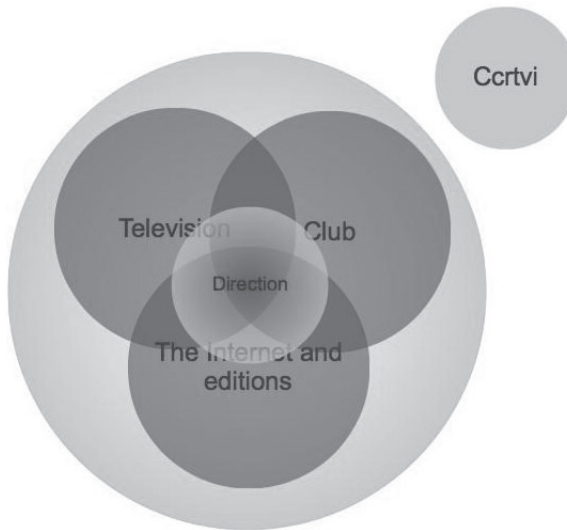
On the other hand, there has been uneven development of products for mobile phones. We have noted that these are currently at a stage of incipient development. Information, participation in TVC's mobile portal and promotional services, such as program-associated ring-tones, polyphonic ring-tones and screen-savers stand out, while no special productions or adaptations are being produced for mobile phones yet. However, it is important to clarify that all of the programmes in this study are accessible on 3alacarta, TVC's online service that delivers video on demand, which is available on the Internet and TVC's mobile portal.

The Configuration of Production Networks

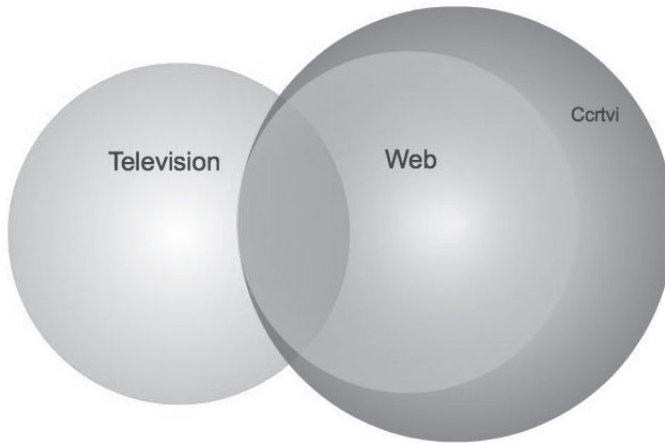
In an attempt to globally compare the production of the four programmes investigated, the first thing to catch our attention is that each presents a different production network. Even though the programmes are registered under the name of TVC and rely on a common company structure, each programme displays unique cross-media television characteristics. The most radical difference between the programmes is the division of labour in the groups formed.

In the case of Club Super3, the cross-media production is largely centred on one single team, composed of some 30 professionals distributed across three groups: (1) television, (2) club, and (3) Internet editions. They are all located in the same building and receive orders from a single manager, who is in charge of giving instructions and directly supervises the work process. In this network, the Catalan Corporation of Interactive Radio and Television (*Corporació Catalana de Radio i Televisió Interactiva*, CCRTVI), TVC's affiliated company, participates in the elaboration of some multiplatform products by providing support services.

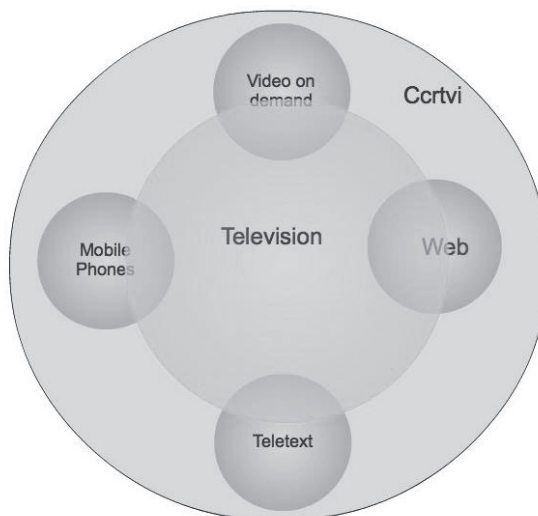
Figure 1. Production Groups in the Club Super3 Programme



In the case of 3xl.cat, the cross-media production is carried out by twenty-five professionals, fourteen of whom are associated with TVC, three are associated with CCRTVI and eight are external collaborators. The staff is divided into two groups: the television group and the web group, and there is one manager for each group. In this network, the employees working on the programme's web are located in the CCRTVI headquarters, but work exclusively on 3xl.cat.

Figure 2. Production Groups in the 3xl.cat programme

In Loops! and Ritmes.clips, the production of cross-media contents is carried out by different groups. Even though these groups are not officially associated with the programmes and are not part of their staff, they contribute to their multiplatform production. This is because a large part of the responsibility for cross-media production tasks corresponds to different CCRTVI professionals, who are also responsible for the administration of the ritmes.cat portal and the services offered by the Ritmes brand on DTT, teletext, and mobile phone platforms.

Figure 3. Production Groups in the Loops! and Ritmes.clips Programmes

Figures one, two, and three, and the clear differences between them, are indicators of the three essential types of management practice and group formation employed in the established cross-media production networks. We have categorised the different types of organization as concentrated, mixed, and dispersed. First, the concentrated network of cross-media production stands out because most multiplatform products are elaborated by a group of human and nonhuman actors located in one single spatial environment in the company and are managed by one person. Second, the mixed network indicates the presence of two groups, clearly distinguished by their locations and tasks. While one of these groups is responsible for Internet products, the other is in charge of producing the television programme. Finally, the dispersed network is distinguished by the presence of various groups involved in the elaboration of multiplatform products in different locations and company sectors. In this alignment, the interrelation between the teams is limited and coordination is achieved independently in different sectors, under the supervision of various directors.

In these network configurations, cross-media production is confronted with different dynamics and problems, and is characterized by ambivalences and emerging contradictions. In the concentrated network, the way the groups are organized helps to establish a certain order and offers the project global coherence by facilitating integration and collective learning. However, it generates dynamics of exclusion. The professionals tend to retract and become isolated, which constitutes a hindrance to cooperation and to the possibility of mutual benefit from the use of the company's common resources.

In the case of the mixed network, the presence of the television and Internet division allocates opportunities for greater autonomy, motivation, and subsequently creativity by the professionals associated with each platform. But in the long run, this decentralization leads to incoherent strategies between the groups and to qualitatively poorer development than what could be achieved by working on both platforms to achieve common objectives. The dispersed network is the least demanding in particular resources; it does not require the assignment of professionals that are specifically responsible for carrying out cross-media production tasks in each programme. However, this "saving" clearly results in impoverished multiplatform products.

The above results show that different group formations are established according to the conditions that the organization needs to comply with. However, we do not imply that these networks are static. From an ANT perspective, rather than considering them to be inert entities, we need to understand them as structures that are susceptible to change and transformation in order to respond to the increasing production needs.

For example, in the case of Club Super3, the Internet and editions group is a new addition that appeared after the emergence of a new series of products.

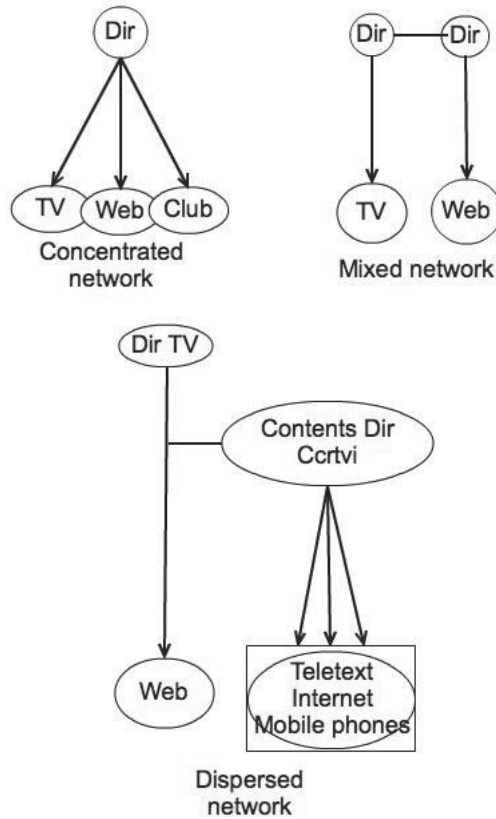
In 3xl.cat, all the teams were initially located in one single spatial environment following the distribution of a concentrated network but were later divided, which led to the adoption of a mixed arrangement. As a matter of fact, in recent years, changes in organisation and company strategies clearly influenced the mixed network configuration of 3xl.cat. In 2008, the television group was dissolved following the suppression of exclusive DTT product creation. There are only two remaining collaborators in TVC; one of them produces a synopsis of the 3xl.cat series for the portal and the other coordinates the web content. At the same time, the team that was in charge of administrating the portal is assigned to a new programme, and the portal is absorbed into the CCRTVI area of virtual communities, children's websites and games. From that point onwards, there has only been one editor in charge of managing the online spaces for ritmes.cat and 3xl.cat; in turn, this junction of the two portals' functions generates a new network that was not included in the initial planning of either of the two projects.

Coordination Mechanisms

In the concentrated network, the management exerts direct control over all of the aspects related to the services that are distributed in accordance with the multiplatform products. As the professionals themselves put it, the production of the services is carried out following the "legs of the club". In the mixed network, the coordination relies on two centres, which are responsible for decision making and directly supervise the elaboration of the contents broadcast on television and the Internet. In the dispersed network, coordination constitutes a less regulated process, largely dependent on the CCRTVI content manager. Figure 4 shows the three basic forms of coordination that characterize the production process in the concentrated, mixed, and dispersed networks, as previously discussed.

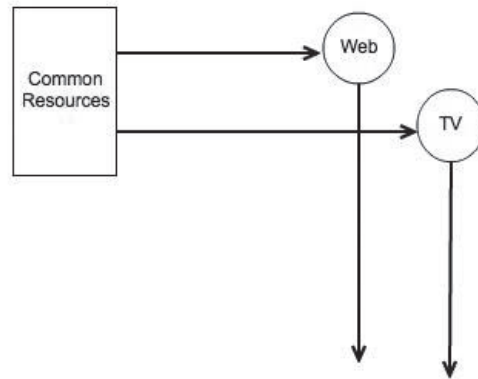
In the concentrated network, production focalizes on the television platform, i.e., the overall media production is planned around the scheduled programme and follows the particular calendar devised for this type of transmission; subsequently creation for all other platforms is subordinate to the television production. The manager takes on the tasks of "superdesk" (Bødker and Bechmann Petersen 2007) and is in charge of orchestrating the multifaceted production of the programme. He selects the most adequate medium for its transmission, distributes the tasks across the producers and plans their execution, while the manager's assistant acts as "media conductor" (Bødker and Bechmann Petersen 2007) and facilitates coordination and communication between all the groups.

In the mixed network, the presence of two groups, one responsible for the Internet and the other for the television programme entails the creation of ap-

Figure 4. Forms of Coordination

appropriate production networks in order to elaborate contents for each medium and establish meeting points between them, to share resources with one another and at the same time maintain their independency, as shown in Figure 5.

In contrast, the functions in the dispersed network are less regulated. Coordination mechanisms are constantly created and vary according to the needs of the specific projects. In this case, the hierarchical structures are not very clear so the executives are not the ones who standardise the tasks. Moreover, in the case of the *Loops!* and *Ritmes.clips* programmes, standardisation results from an informal negotiation of suitable routines or rules for coordination between the professionals who participate in the cross-media production. The administration of the *ritmes.cat* portal, for example, is carried out through informal communication and certain time limits that the professionals themselves fix; therefore it does not draw on a direct regulated coordination.

Figure 5. Mutual Adjustment in the Mixed Network

Cross-media Flows

In this part of the analysis, the participation of human and nonhuman actors in each network was identified. Both categories of actors act simultaneously, transferring capacities to one another. Due to the associations and translations, the actors assume a network-specific role proportionate to the agency, which is defined by Latour (2008) as the ability to intervene in some way in the status quo, transforming A to B using C.

Figures four, five and six provide a visualization of the relations in each of these networks in order to facilitate an understanding of these flows. We represent the direct intervention of the teams associated with the elaboration of each product with solid lines and we use dotted lines to show the adaptation of content from one platform to another, mediated by the technical processes put forward mainly by the content manager system. The human groups are inscribed within the coloured spheres and the multiplatform products are presented on the white background.

As the graphs show, the organizational structure of each network and the projected multiplatform product determine the way the workflow between the actors is constructed. We cannot identify any practices that denote a sequential or synchronous adjustment or a global interaction between the multiplatform production flows of the programmes, given that the production for each platform is subject to the temporality and specific conditions surrounding the elaboration and broadcasting. In a digital milieu, technical content management systems inflict a fortuitous order on the production processes. According to Franquet and Villa (2010), the results of this study indicate that without content management systems, it seems unfeasible to fully adopt new platforms.

Figure 6. Production Flows of Club Super3

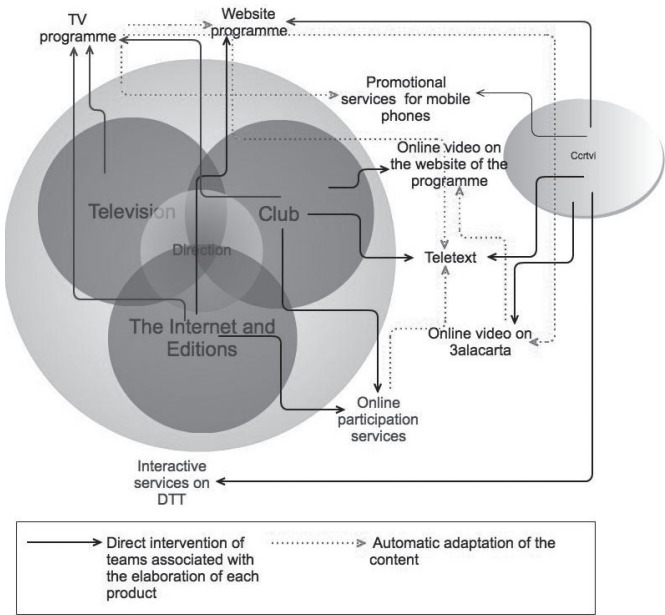


Figure 7. Production Flows of 3xl.cat

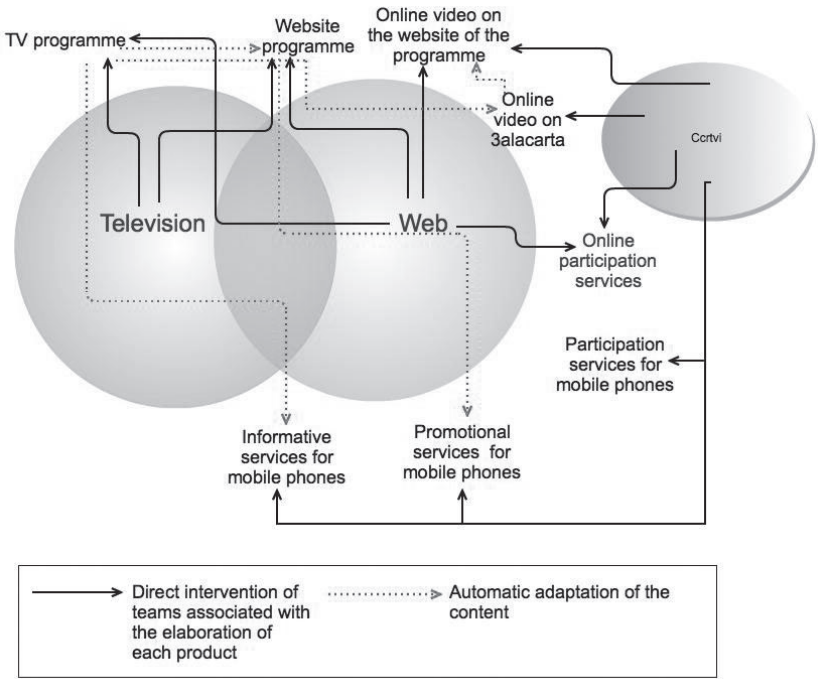
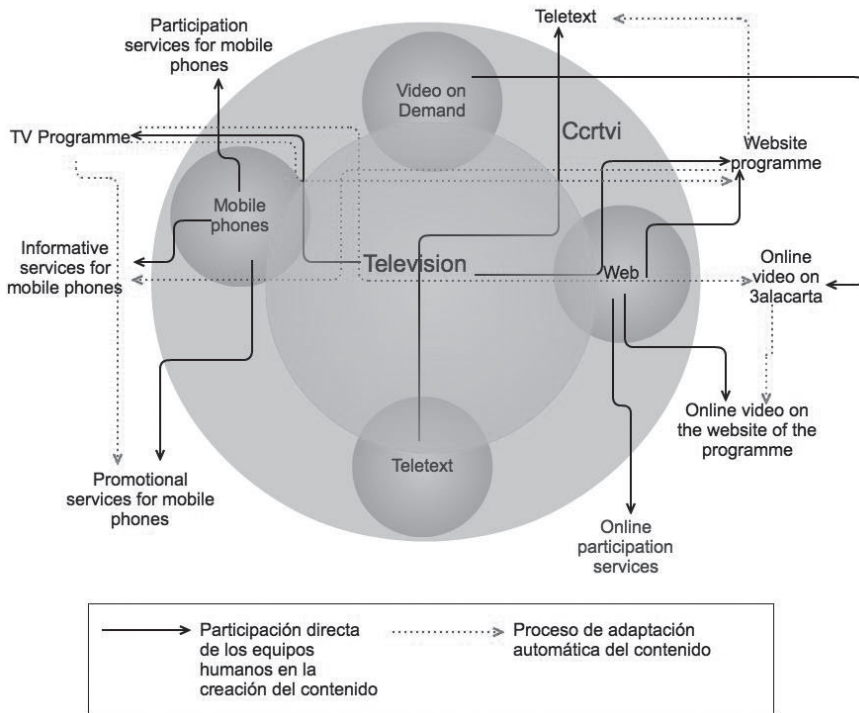


Figure 8. Production Flows of Loops! and Ritmes.clips

The cross-media content flow has no starting or end point and does not resemble the case of a “relay race”, in which a professional on a particular platform passes the content on to another. This would certainly assign a simpler task to the researcher. But in a cross-media environment, the investigator should begin by identifying the temporal and spatial boundaries that condition the production, since production can develop simultaneously across different spatial locations.

Following the dotted lines, we may conclude that, generally-speaking, the nonhuman actors regulate and homogenize the production practices of teletext, interactive services, and mobile phones through technical processes, while the human actors interact in highly diverse and often transversal ways to achieve platform-adjusted production, in accordance with the distinctive features of the particular production network. Although digital technology has benefitted the processes of searching for and interchanging content thanks to networked access to audiovisual items, it has contributed little to the collaboration between individuals working for different media, who no longer have to establish human contact in order to achieve what they want online.

Levels of Association

As the number of platforms grows and technology-centred production practices increase, the ties and relations between sectors and companies are becoming more complex and abstract; so the use of organisational diagrams to explain these relations proves somewhat limiting. It is more suitable to trace the actors' trajectory towards the elaboration of specific multiplatform products and understand the practices involved from their perspective.

The observations and interviews indicate that there is no single type of association between the different groups participating in production. Accordingly, we identify three levels of relation corresponding to the degree of association between actors in the specific flow of cross-media production, which we named interaction, cooperation and integration, three concepts borrowed from cooperation studies of management organizations.

First, interaction describes an exchange of information, contents or any type of resource shared by two or more groups to support the development of a multiplatform product. This interaction takes place at random, during non-coordinated, non-conscious, and non-voluntary tasks. We found instances of interaction in all the networks, in which various groups participate in multiplatform production, without necessarily relying on a voluntary coordination of tasks. This occurs mainly because of the "technification" of the exchanges and the retrieval of digital contents. We found a large amount of team interactions take place in the cases of production and transmission of the interactive services for DTT and multiplatform products for mobile phones. In the four programmes investigated, interactions play a key role in the way these multiplatform products are elaborated, but the actors themselves are not always aware of their importance. The actors often ignore the actual production process and the technical tasks entailed in the release of these services.

Cooperation, as the second type of relation, reflects a coordinated association between actors, which is both conscious and voluntary. To cooperate means to partially participate in the activity of other actors endeavouring to strengthen and amplify the final multiplatform product. This type of association is essential for the participants in cross-media production. In this case, each actor's contribution to the final product varies and depends on the network and the particular arrangements made in each case. Cooperation, as opposed to interaction, facilitates the consolidation of a common organisational culture on different platforms. If we look at the origins and actors involved in cooperative tasks, we note that cooperation mostly takes place between managers. But looking at the daily practices of the staff, who carry out the most basic work on each platform, we find that there is often no real cooperation between the different groups involved and multiplatform products are developed through specialized and segmented production systems.

Finally, integration is the result of coordinated, conscious, and voluntary complementary actions during all the phases of the product, from initial conceptualization to implementation. Integration consists of a significantly higher degree of joint activity than cooperation. In this production flow, the actors actively participate in all the stages involved in the elaboration of the multiplatform product. In integration scenarios, the implementation of the products does not exclusively fall on the shoulders of the managers and coordinators, but is assumed by all the participant team members. However, we found that none of the networks include integration in their general practices; integration rather features in concrete projects, in which audience participation is regarded as the common denominator. For example, in competitions, where the television programme team announces the event, the website team conveys the contents that the public sends, and professionals performing mobile telephone services often introduce mediation tools for sending photographs, videos or texts to the programme.

Conclusions

The investigation of the Club Super3, 3xl.cat, Loops! and Ritmes.clips programmes, which were chosen and analysed as representative case studies of the multiplatform development on TVC, revealed that all the television programmes deploy different cross-media production practices. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no unified and all-encompassing cross-media production system, but rather there are several and ever-changing ones, depending on the circumstances encountered in each case. At first sight, this affirmation may appear elementary and obvious since it is widely admitted that production companies continuously and inevitably mould their organizational practices. However, it may prove to be a fundamental starting point for future researchers in this field, given that the heterogeneity of production practices does not allow for unique multiplatform management, and it is possible to achieve cross-media production by following different organizational patterns.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) helped establish an interpretative framework in which every finding acquired a specific meaning according to the objective of this investigation. Specifically, the idea of a network appeared to be particularly useful for identifying the functions of the human and nonhuman actors participating in the cross-media production and understanding the way they relate to each other when creating the same.

The findings showed that cross-media production practices are not predictable; they do not imply routine and rigid work patterns and evade every attempt at generalization. The work practices discussed in this study reflect a large number of changes resulting from technological innovations; accord-

ingly, they are characterized by their transformability in time and space. The elaboration of each of the products brings about new associations that alter the positions of the actors and their roles in relation to the other actors in the network. Consequently, we need to formulate appropriate questions to guide us through the investigation of cross-media production in public service broadcasters; such questions should not imply a totalitarian view of the phenomenon, but rather seek to understand the networks and the way they have unfolded through specific case studies.

We have also identified heterogeneous coordination centres, flows and association levels in the concentrated, mixed, and dispersed networks we observed. In a period of change and implementation of new products, these different configurations are the result of an adaptation process that was necessary in order to ensure the programmes' subsistence. As the elaboration of television products becomes more complex, the order that previously guided programmes has become diluted. Formerly valid ways of coordination can no longer be operationalized and the institutional order is readjusted. In fact, situations directed or controlled by the management as part of its general strategic plan but also the competences and interests of the professionals themselves contribute to the construction of the overall physiognomy of cross-media networks.

As we have seen, professionals and technology generate associations in order to benefit from their common resources and establish a familiar production framework. However, the results avoid generalizations. It is essential for studies to continue looking in greater depth at cross-media production because as we have seen in this research, we are faced with a process of change that has barely started for public service broadcasting organizations and media practitioners that are affected by it.

Note

1. This article presents some of the results of the PhD thesis: "Cross-media television production: The case of Televisió de Catalunya", which was part of the project: "Cross-media environment organisational and production transformations in radio and television groups (CSO2009-09367), financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain and carried out by the Image, Sound and Synthesis Group at Autonomous University of Barcelona.

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III

Producers of Communities

Communities of Producers

Bringing up Bg-mamma

Organized Producers between Community and Commerce

Maria Bakardjieva

When one mentions bg-mamma in a conversation with a Bulgarian friend, it is very likely that one's counterpart will respond: "they almost ruined a bank", or "they organized a concert", "they stopped proposed GMO legislation", or "their site comes up on top, no matter what search you enter in google.bg". These are all simple and truthful statements, but who the subject implied by the "they" actually is remains rather misty. After all, bg-mamma.com is a web site,¹ a virtual space with fluid, fluctuating and, for the most part, anonymous population, one of those online aggregations of nicks, posts and links that typically stays circumscribed within the nebulous realm of cyberspace. How does it happen then that actions and effects transpiring in the real – physical and social – world are attributed to a URL? What or who does this URL stand for?

This chapter will focus on the question how social entities such as bg-mamma could be defined and understood. What animates such collective formations and what are the organics of their engendering and the pragmatics of their mobilization? What kind of "producers" in the multiple sense of this term suggested by Olsson (chapter 1 in this volume) do they involve and how are new modes of mediation implicated in their operation? Where on the map of media theory and within the vocabulary of media studies can we find the right place to start and the right words to discuss such entities?

Phenomena like bg-mamma captured the imagination of researchers very early on in the dawn of mass Internet adoption. Under the caption of "virtual communities" proposed by Harold Rheingold (1993) congregations of people online that develop a sense of collective identity and belonging have been investigated in a lot of depth (Jones 1995; Jones 1997; Baym 1997; Wittel 2001). A number of their peculiar properties such as the construction of strong relationships despite the absence of physical encounter, the establishment of shared values, norms and techniques for effective communication through innovative means adjusted to the new environment have been documented. One of the central questions raised and debated by researchers has been whether these

“virtual communities” measure up to the level of importance and quality of relationships characterizing real communities.

Before any side was able to definitively win the virtual community debate, the excitement around the “warmly persuasive” (Williams 1985:76) notion of community as the favoured lens for viewing the forms of online social life gradually cooled down. The concept of networks loomed large (Wellman *et al.* 2003; Aguiton & Cardon 2007; Postill 2008; Wilson 2010) in discussions of virtual sociality. This substitution went hand in hand with, and was reinforced by the development of new software designs and applications that came to replace the earlier platforms (newsgroups, mailing lists, web-based forums). Thus the preference shifted from talking about membership in online communities sharing cultural identity and mutual commitment to highlighting individuals’ loose involvement in networks of strong and weak ties that allow for occasional and typically partial mobilization depending on circumstances and demand.

Yet neither “community” nor “network” is fully sufficient to describe the form of togetherness exemplified by a social entity such as bg-mamma. Unlike community it demonstrates a high degree of openness and fluidity, hosts diverse interests, values and ideologies and lacks a unitary cultural sense of membership or identity. On the other hand, unlike network, it is not defined merely by a latent structure of links. It has its characteristic substantive elements, in other words, not simply the mesh of connections, but the content and meanings that flow across these connections make bg-mamma what it is.

To try out another conceptual pair as candidates for capturing the nature of bg-mamma, I turn to the notions of the “public sphere” and that of “wild publics”. Bg-mamma is certainly not a good candidate for a public sphere because the discourse that fills its virtual spaces makes no claim of being rational, publically relevant or impartial. In fact, it most often is exactly the opposite – fired by emotion and openly trumpeting very personal interests and concerns. “Wild publics”, is a label proposed for an alternative mode of publicness characterized by: “pluralistic and conflictual heteroglossia” (Gardiner 2004: 38). Such were, Gardiner has argued, the market place and the public square in early modern times. With their “tumultuous intermingling of diverse social groups and widely divergent styles and idioms of language” (*ibid.*: 38) they were contested spaces where rational dialogue was a rare exception rather than the norm. While bg-mamma surely parades a spectrum of widely divergent styles and idioms of language, humorous as well as serious, verbal clashes and carnivalesque strategies, it also engenders sufficient agreement to facilitate collective content production and, on specific occasions, mobilization for organized action, something that wild publics are notoriously weak at.

In the study presented in this chapter, I have made the choice not to refer to bg-mamma by any of the popular terms considered so far. Instead, I adopt the strategy of looking for and bringing to light the factors responsible for the

site's existence; for the continuous reproduction of social life within it; and most importantly, for its emergence as an actor in the offline social world. My hope is that put on such empirical footing, directions for further conceptual work will open up.

In the course of three years, 2009-2011, I conducted a qualitative case study designed to capture the site's structure and policies as well as selected aspects of the multifarious micro interactions that occurred on it. My attention was focused more specifically on instances of collective action originating on the site that had manifestations and effects in the offline world. To highlight the foundational elements responsible for the site's continuing existence, I interviewed its founders (and partial owners) and several moderators. I also conducted textual analysis of the central policy documents explicating the site's mandate and acceptable uses. In order to trace some of the more important developments that led to the site's emergence as a recognized actor in Bulgarian public life, I conducted in-depth interviews with some bg-mamma participants who had played key roles in events initiated on the site that had spilled over into the real life of physical spaces, political institutions and civic movements. Parallel to that, the close reading of the discourse unfolding on the site in relation to these events proved to be another valuable technique.

In what follows, I will discuss the central pillars of social life on the site that I identified through my research. I found the forces that hold the site together and allow its constant reproduction and effective performance outside of cyberspace at several levels which I have labelled materiality, personality, utility, sociability and solidarity. Examining each of these dimensions in depth I expect to be able to chart the trajectory of movement of people and resources from the offline to the online world and back that brings this complex technosocial phenomenon into existence and makes it a power to be reckoned with in the wider social landscape.

Materiality

All virtuality discourse notwithstanding, entities like bg-mamma arise around a material configuration of hardware, software and interfaces and the constant supply of the resources needed to sustain these in an operational condition. In bg-mamma's case the material beginnings were modest and precarious. The site started out as partly educational, partly hobbyist project of a novice web designer. This designer happened to be a young mother and a member of a moms' peer group that frequented one of the many forums hosted by the Bulgarian information portal *dir.bg*. Two things came together to set the newly created site afloat: the founder's access to a server and her fledgling technical skills along with a small group of users with already established interest in

discussing and reflecting together on their motherly experiences. As that group busily accumulated information and conversation on a variety of topics related to raising children, new members joined in and the initial technical shell grew tight and uncomfortable. Thus, the site morphed along the materiality dimension from a free-time personal endeavour successively into a small business sustained by an electronic shop selling products for children, a small business financed by advertising, and most recently (since December 2008), one of the ventures of a new Bulgarian online media company, Net Entertainment Group. Early on in the course of these transformations there was a moment when the users collected donations to help upgrade the server, but that kind of user sponsorship was insufficient to sustain the site's rapid growth. Therefore, the later commercial models based on advertising revenue had to be adopted. The expansion of the user population and the reliance on advertising revenue posed immediate challenges to the site's original community ethos. Special care to preserve that ethos in the face of commercial pressure had to be taken in two main areas: ensuring that no hidden advertising is circulated through the site under the guise of member postings, opinions, endorsements, etc., and keeping a strict distinction between business policy and management of the site's use and content flow. For the original owner, who continued to play the role of site administrator, protecting the communal spirit and values was essential for preserving user trust in the authenticity of the exchanges occurring on the site. She defined her mission as a guardian of these features and when the site went up for sale she chose the buyer that promised to leave the content and the editorial policy unchanged and gave her a solid position in the making of the strategic decisions.²

Personality

The personality dimension comes into play in the course of this metamorphosis of the site because the original founder, manager and owner, has had, and still has, a decisive role in its shaping. Marina Kuzmanova, now 35, is probably the best known "mamma" in Bulgaria. Over the years she has creatively navigated the rough waters of the Bulgarian Internet industry switching between different business models, but determined to preserve the original "idea" of the site, namely, that before everything else, it should be a place for "mutual aid" among mothers.³

Kuzmanova's insistence upon the integrity of personality represents an important aspect of the site's policy. In order to access its full functionality, users are required to register with a nickname and an actual e-mail address. Once registered, they are expected to hold only one account and thus sustain the forum persona anchored in it. Opening multiple accounts is forbidden and

strictly policed through technical means. The registered forum persona (no real names are required) becomes the carrier of responsibility for its own actions and respectively can be rewarded and punished, can build status, reputation or be kicked out of the site for good. In this way, the online personalities of bg-mamma members become a joint product of their offline social status, situation and interests and of their behaviour and interactions with others in the virtual space. The relationships developed in the forums oscillate between the virtual and the embodied as well because members bring to their online conversations knowledge and experience from the real world and vice versa, test, make use of and otherwise apply what they have learned online in their offline practice. In addition, they often extend their online acquaintanceships by face-to-face meetings.

Thus, although individuals do not register on the site with their real names and biographies, they do not go on bg-mamma to experiment with identity, but rather to expand and deepen salient aspects of the identities they have evolved offline through the advice and support for the practical projects associated with these identities provided by the online community. This makes the authenticity of their performance on the site guaranteed most of the time. There have been cases of deliberate deception, fake stories or strategic manipulation by registered users, however, those have been quite promptly detected and exposed by the sensitive and alert membership.

Thus, personality on bg-mamma is brought to life and recognition through consistent and active participation in the discussions on the multiple forums, by supplying relevant information under the important themes archived on the site and in other ways contributing to the project of mutual aid and support. Members build reputation not only informally, but also through a formal metric system. Users' activities on the site are quantified, particularly the contributions they post in the thematic forums considered to be the most important information resources for mothers. On that basis, a hierarchy of user categories has emerged denoted by the number of stars appearing under the nickname of the author in every post. Members' standing in this hierarchy affects the way in which their postings are accepted and judged by others. The rank system includes novice, enthusiast, user, regular user, devotee, honourable member and veteran. Each consecutive rank is awarded when a certain number of posts have been accumulated by the user and grants its holder a progressive increase of the volume of her bg-mamma personal mailbox. The ranks are also associated with the privilege to post in some popular forums such as "Buy-and-Sell", "Vacation Destinations" and others that are closed to newcomers. There exists a restrictive designation called "spammer", that is awarded to users who have published "pointless posts, multiple opinions unrelated to the forum theme, advertising messages, and to those who send mass calls or personal messages containing advertising."⁴ When such behaviour persists despite warnings, the

respective user's access to the site is taken away. In the presence of all these sanctions and incentives, personality construction on bg-mamma cannot be a careless affair. It is a long-term project, and as such is taken by members very seriously.

Utility

The authenticity of interests and needs that members bring to the site is closely related to the site's utility. Most of the initiation stories that members tell contain an element of a practical need that had led the respective woman to the site: one was looking for a stroller, another wanted to get recommendations for a baby-sitter, yet another simply felt lonely and bored as a stay-home mom and needed a meaningful conversation.⁵ These concrete motives are quickly forgotten as the immersion in the full-blown experience of bg-mamma takes over, however they are the ones that pave the way of ever more new members to the site. Utilitarian interests continue to play an important role at all stages of participants' involvement with the site, but change their form and content. Women (and men) visit bg-mamma to find information and support concerning specific topical needs related to children illnesses, disabilities, diets, social services and the help of different kinds of professionals, to name just a few. Members see the site as the best source of advice on an array of subjects spanning washing detergents and cooking recipes, nursing and baby food, day care centres, getting pregnant, finding a doctor to help with a particular condition, ways to react to one's mother-in-law's intrusion, and countless other practical, social and emotional problems that people encounter in their daily lives.

The father of an autistic child, for example, described the learning trajectory that he had traversed as a member of the respective bg-mamma forum. Living in a small town where medical and social services for children and families had been severely depleted, he used the forum as a vital source of information and guidance as to how to handle the different symptoms and stages of his son's condition. He received books and medicines from members of the forum by mail and found out about a variety of treatment methods that he could then actively demand from his local practitioners. These useful offerings as well as the need to share and receive, as well as give, emotional support had gradually made the forum the first place to go to when he turned on his computer in the morning. In his interview, the man admitted that he would even seek news on current affairs in the bg-mamma forums first because, as he put it, anything of public significance would quickly find its way into these discussions. In other words, the site was providing utility to him at several different levels – from the concretely implementable suggestions about how to respond to the changes in his son's condition and what to ask from doctors and social workers, to a

secondary service of sifting and bringing into focus the developments in the country's social and political life.

All these utilitarian exchanges, notably, do not take the form of pure informational transaction occurring in a social vacuum. They come embedded in the life stories of both inquirers and respondents, coloured by their unique experiences and animated by their sighs, groans and exclamations. Bg-mamma is not a Wikipedia of children-related information or a database of faceless facts and recommendations (although it does offer an extensive “library” of such information too). Along with possible solutions of their issues, inquirers also learn about the life and ordeals of those who offer the answers, get a taste of their spontaneous expression, personal philosophy and character. In bg-mamma utility arrives inseparably intertwined with sociability.

Sociability

Sociability cannot be separated from utility also for another reason: it is often itself the utility the user seeks. Members come to the site to be with others in order to learn and get support, or for the sheer pleasure of it. Whether for its own sake or intermeshed with other motives, sociability becomes a powerful organizing force that keeps the community going. With time, members come to know each other well (or as well as possible in a virtual environment) based on the patterns of behaviour, forms of expression, depth and breadth of knowledge and relational ethics exhibited in strings of postings. The site allows postings to be summoned and inspected by author's name, but regular participants hardly need that feature. They form affiliations and attractions, or the opposite, as their observations of others' performance in the forums accumulate.

My friend, the one which is now the closest to me – we found each other through the forum. In the forum we started finding common interests, we wrote in the same places [themes], and because she was also interested in breastfeeding, she started coming to the meetings of the La Leche League, and so our friendship grew into a live friendship. We see each other very often, our children attend the same daycare... I had given her the key to my house to water my flowers while I was on vacation. (Boo, breastfeeding forum moderator)

Beyond one-to-one relations, sociability is responsible for the emergence of various configurations of group connections and cultures, which evolve their own stars, opinion leaders and followers as exemplified in the interview with one participant and civic activist:

There are people who have gained authority [among participants] and whatever they say, their word has weight. Even, sometimes in themes that are

problematic some people would write: “Come on, when will so-and-so drop in to say what s/he thinks...”. (OP)

Beyond the informal sociability in the forums, there exists a strict framework of *organized sociability* that regulates interactions among members. The ranking described earlier represents only one of its dimensions. Central to this framework is the set of written rules of conduct that, as the founder, Kuzmanova, explains, has taken shape gradually over the years of operation. These rules postulate the kinds of content that are not allowed on the site (pornography, hate speech, emotionally disturbing images and words), but they also specify the kinds of communication that are discouraged or banned from the forums: angry and offensive posts, demeaning posts that target users or groups, spam, flood and chat, commercial advertising, games, casual exchanges, personal conversations between two participants, political propaganda. “The purpose of the forum is to help members and not to be used for idle talk and personal conversations. For idle talk use the chat channel, and for the personal conversations there is a function called ‘personal messages’” instructs the “Forums Rules” page in no unclear language. Along with determining the ethical code of communication on the site, these rules go a long way in ensuring thematic order and consistency across the different forums and the themes (threads) opened in them. The goal is to avoid repetition, to gather similar topics under the same thematic umbrella, to establish a clear procedure for opening and closing of themes. These are intended to increase utility, ease of navigation and access to desired information or discussion.

The rules page does not promise anything close to the free and unfettered interaction that is the usual expectation of online forums. It sounds rather disciplinarian and uncompromising. The sanctions that users failing to comply with these rules would incur are also clearly outlined. They include measures ranging from warnings and access bans of different duration to permanent banishment from the site, erasure of content and closure of themes by the administrators. Interestingly enough, while some members have seen these rules as an unacceptable assault on their personal freedom, droves of others have been happy to comply and to embrace the site as a place to learn, share and socialize.

People comply [with the rules] absolutely voluntarily, and these are many, thousands, hundreds of thousands [of people]... If someone comes and wants to proclaim something [referring to the restriction on political propaganda], the others destroy it. This is a live, self-regulating organism. (OP)

This fact raises the interesting question why the forms of discipline established on bg-mamma have worked effectively without alienating users. Why have participants in this online space agreed to accept limitations to their personal

freedom? Research on Wikipedia (Firer-Blaess 2011; Hansen *et al.* 2007) has demonstrated that its community of contributors has established a set of grass-roots or “rhizomic” mechanisms of normalization (disciplines), which has allowed it to maintain an ongoing rational discourse and decision-making. These “disciplines” Firer-Blaess (2011) argues are a necessary condition for the rational discourse to occur. The case of bg-mamma is both similar and different from that of Wikipedia. Like Wikipedia, the interactions taking place on bg-mamma (albeit they cannot always be classified as rational discourse) depend on the disciplining, or subjectivation (in the Foucauldian sense) of members so that an ethical code of civility with its pertaining respect for the opinion and dignity of the interlocutor is upheld. Without putting that code in place, none of the purposes and proven effects of bg-mamma such as mutual trust, personal sharing, emotional and practical support, knowledge enrichment and pleasurable sociability would have been possible. Because of the highly personal and emotional nature of many of the issues discussed, without disciplined adherence to such a code forum exchanges could have easily unravelled into meaningless noise, endless wrangling and animosity. The different rules making up the code have been formulated gradually in response to problems arising in the course of community life. When asked what she would do differently, if she had to start a new site today, founder Marina Kuzmanova responded: “Perhaps the only thing would be to start out with the already crystallized rules that we have today in order to avoid the problems that lead to their creation.”

In contrast to Wikipedia, however, the discipline in bg-mamma is hierarchical, as opposed to rhizomic, first, because it is the authoritative figure of the founder and administrator of the site who coins the rules and secondly, because discipline is imposed by a hierarchically organized team of moderators who are endowed with status, rights and functions exceeding those of regular users. It is interesting and instructive to look at the details of the site’s disciplinary practices and to reflect on their nature a bit further. Possibly, this would help us add nuance to the plural notion of “disciplines” proposed by Firer-Blaess (2011) and to understand better the character of “organized production” occurring on the site.

The system of moderation is one of the most interesting organizational innovations of the bg-mamma site in the Bulgarian Internet context. The power and glory of the site to a large extent derives from the commitment and skills of experienced volunteers who take on the forum moderator role. In the early days of the site the forum moderator has been a position for which members have been nominated and elected through voting. With the expansion of the user population and the ensuing complex social dynamics involving diverse groups, interests and cultures, the moderators have become appointments of the site administrator in consultation with the already existing moderator team. Their choice is based on the performance record of the potential candidates

in the respective forums, the level of their engagement and activity, their commitment to the rules of conduct as well as their personal qualities manifested in their contributions. Moderating a bg-mamma forum is hard work, which can require up to five hours a day as pointed out by the moderators interviewed. The job description includes an informational house-keeping function where moderators are expected to organize the useful information posted in the forum into the so-called forum libraries consisting of articles, summaries of discussion with high informational value, useful links and references.

The second important aspect of their role is to monitor the forum discussion and to enforce the rules of conduct. This involves numerous actions such as giving warnings, mediating between opposing opinions and camps and suspending users from accessing the forum for various periods of time. Along with that, moderators form an advisory group that consults with one another and with the administrator on issues of forum policy and on some of the more challenging or drastic problem cases that arise. Asked to describe their role in comparison to widely known social roles, bg-mamma moderators invoke the notions of the policemen who comes into a disturbance to impose order and sanctions (Vache), the kindergarten teacher who dispenses justice over quarreling children (Boo), the counselor mediating between parties in conflict (Reza). Strikingly, when taken together in the context of the site, the composite of all these model roles seems to be that of the Mother. This stance can be detected in the following statement by a long-time moderator concerning her work in the forum:

For me, these are the normal rules of social interaction that hold face-to-face. Things that a person would not say or do in live communication, she or he should not do when writing hidden behind anonymity. ... It is normal to have arguments, even very emotional ones, but all that has to happen within the framework of basic ethics. ... In the same way that someone would not enter someone else's living room and say "Oh, all of you here are very stupid and do not deserve me..." This is not censorship, it is elementary etiquette that has to be respected. (Boo)

Thus, it could be argued that the type of authority and hence discipline operating on the site is that of a benevolent collective matriarch. The rules of the forums as well as each individual moderator's decision can be questioned in an appeal to the higher level of authority, the administrator, and to be put up for discussion in a designated forum. The decisions of the administrator, as admitted by Kuzmanova, are often taken in consultation with the moderator team, but once stated, they are final.

The team of moderators that exerts this clearly structured control over members' activities on the site is made up of volunteers. The people vested with this responsibility do not receive any monetary reward or compensation

although, as noted earlier, they are expected to monitor the developments on the site, to manage and intervene in debates almost full time. Asked about the sources of their extraordinary selflessness moderators explained that they see their role as performing community service and feel responsible for the well-being of the community. They are not seeking rewards other than the respect of community members, the opportunity to collaborate with other similarly motivated people, i.e. other moderators, and the learning that occurs in the process of doing their job:

One is as free to start doing this kind of work as one is free to stop doing it. The moment you feel exploited, you can quit. ... For me, it was simply very interesting. And it is still interesting. It is interesting to observe a society of this kind. (Reza)

What I get from the forum is the gratification of the contact with others. I relax in this forum. The people I meet there I consider friends. It is easy to get a sense when someone is happy with what you have done and this is quite nice. More or less I have become a psychologist, I understand people better. (Vache)

The moderators are the human scales that are called upon to maintain a balance between freedom of expression (and the motivation among participants to contribute to the forums that comes with it) and what can be called the discipline of expression required for sustaining the site's established ethos. They are largely successful in doing this job, which, admittedly happens at the expense of "losing some" so to say, because from time to time users who feel "censored" or unfairly treated decide to leave. It is a delicate battle because as much as the forum rules are formally stated, the definition of "offensive speech", "idle talk" "political propaganda" are far from clear and need to be re-negotiated in each particular case.

In fact, this is the good thing about this forum compared to all other forums, and something that absolutely everyone in honesty will have to admit: that any person can express any opinion as long as it is formulated in a way that does not offend anyone. I am firmly convinced that any person of average intellect is capable of doing this. Some people are tempted to write some bombastic and sometimes ironic and subtly offensive opinions... Now, the power of language is huge and anyone can write something in a way that hurts another person even without vulgar words and that kind of thing. This is actually a very fine line. That is where I face big problems because if there are no blatant offences against a person, but still someone feels hurt, it becomes very complicated... (Reza)

Apart from the vigilance of the moderators, which as they admit, has its human limits, widely used is a function labeled "Inform a Moderator" through

which the users themselves can notify the moderators every time they feel exchanges in the numerous bg-mamma forums are stepping out of line. This practice resembles what (Firer-Blaess 2011) calls “the hyperpanopticon” where not only one privileged gaze is empowered to observe what is going on in the social field, but rather every participant is simultaneously an observer leading to “multiplication of the eyes involved” in surveillance. Unlike Wikipedia, which is the paradigmatic case analysed by Firer-Blaess, bg-mamma does not employ complex mechanisms of peer conflict resolution and sanctioning, but rather relies on the good old “complain to Mom” technique of notifying those in charge that the rules have been broken in the course of interactions beyond their gaze. Asked whether the button “Inform a Moderator” is used frequently one of the moderators recounts:

Very frequently, because after the forums grew in scale, it turned out that every Tom, Dick and Harry started trying to advertise, to spam, to do (write) all kinds of wild things literally. ... For example, someone registers and comes in to tell everyone “You are so dumb!” and that’s all they are there for. Or, [someone] comes in to say with his or her first and only post “I found a wonderful, magnificent product. Do you want to see it?” So, yes, this function is very widely used. (Reza)

In effect, this function allows users who subscribe to the rules to help enforce the ethos and behavioural etiquette established on the site. Because some of the central categories of this ethos, as noted above, are somewhat fuzzy, recurring practice contributes to their collective clarification. Interviewed moderators pointed out that often people who have been found in violation of the rules and sanctioned become vigilantes who are the first to report breaches performed by others. With time, regular participants go through a gradual learning process and moderators notice that long-term members’ ways of expressing their opinions change. “People become more tolerant,” one moderator observed. In the process of reading different views expressed in different ways they learn and their own style changes in a positive direction: “They become convinced by their own experience that when you manage to make people read your posts and manage not to offend anyone, if you behave normally, the effect is actually very good” (Reza).

The described “normalization” of user behaviour in line with the organized sociability of the site is a result of “soft discipline” defined by Firer-Blaess as “the techniques of teaching and making the individual comply with the rules, *without him perceiving enforcement*. Soft discipline is a *legitimate* form of normalisation, an internalisation of the rule in the thinking and the practices that the individual freely chooses” (2011:141).

Embracing a shared ethos, seasoned participants acquire a sense of belonging and community. They develop identities as accepted and valued bg-mamma

members, which affects the quality of their interactions with others on the site. They become fluent in the expression and behavioural style of the site and thus are able to pursue personal and group projects of increasing variety and complexity. Against this background, members of the bg-mamma community feel empowered to make the next step when the circumstances arise, to seek and actively construct on bg-mamma a social bond of a higher order, namely that of solidarity.

Solidarity

Solidarity, Fenton (2008) points out, “insists on material engagement and goes beyond mediation. It requires mutuality and reciprocity resulting in collective action” (p. 53). I introduce the concept of solidarity to indicate a kind of bond that involves not only shared values and norms, but also shared interpretations of concrete social issues and consensus among a group of people about a particular course of action that can and should be taken vis-à-vis these issues. As such, solidarity entails a special form of production that engenders deliberation, consensus-building, mobilization, coordination and finally, action that makes a difference in the offline world.

Solidarity is far from being a universal experience shared by all bg-mamma users all the time. It emanates from specific situations and involves different groupings of members pulled together by a common conviction or passionate stance. It grows on the fertile soil provided by the sense of comfort and trust developed through sociability. On this basis, individual members, incited by developments in their social environment that they find significant, turn to bg-mamma to seek support for a concern, a project or a cause. This kind of action can refer to a personal problem, for which members need advice, assistance or compassion so that they could tackle more effectively the particular challenges that they face in their offline lives. It can also have a wider relevance and civic or political underpinnings. Interestingly, in the latter case, it would not be qualified as solicitation or overt political advertising because it is seen as a legitimate heartfelt initiative of a known and respected member. Thus starting as a concern of an individual, through the interactions and relationships furnished by bg-mamma, various issues have traveled all the way to the public sphere and have translated into civic and political causes mobilizing collective action.

Over the years, bg-mamma members have built and accomplished solidarity leading to collective action on a variety of causes spanning from charitable donations intended to secure funding for the treatment of a sick child to challenging and effectively blocking proposed legislation, or for that matter, proposing legislative changes. Some of the well known and documented civic initiatives of bg-mamma members produced important changes in the social

policies at the state level. Several social movements have spun from the site and have established themselves as key representatives of civil society taking part in policy-making in their specific areas (e.g. Movement of Bulgarian Mothers, Civic Alliance Smile with Me).⁶ Thanks to well-staged protests of mothers with their baby carriages on the official Day of the Child (June 1), 2005, the stalling parliamentary discussions regarding the increase of maternity benefits were sped up and eventually led to legislation ensuring better state support for maternity and children. A forceful action triggered by a BBC documentary on the abject living conditions in a home for children with disabilities in Northern Bulgaria was undertaken in 2006-2007. It was informed and guided by the expertise of NGO representatives working in that area.⁷ The members of bg-mamma carried out not only charitable activities to supply that and similar homes with necessary materials, but also exerted pressure on central and local administrations which brought about inspections and changes in the homes' staff and management. Most important of all, bg-mamma participants, many of whom were mothers with disabled children themselves, headed a sustained campaign to revise government policy concerning children with disability, to fundamentally change the philosophy on which this policy was based and to convince the public to support such a change. Not only petitions and protests, but also a wide media engagement was orchestrated. Although, no instantaneous improvement of the situation or abrupt shift in the government's approach was possible in this instance, the conversation was opened and the respective administrative bodies set on the path of new policy development.

Most recently (2010), mothers from bg-mamma spearheaded a protest against planned liberalisation of the regulations concerning the growth and consumption of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in Bulgaria. Once information concerning the drafted changes in the law started to crop up in different news outlets, some participants in the forum called for action to stop these changes. In the course of a long and heated discussion in a forum theme designated to the issue, bg-mamma participants worked out a shared understanding of the risks associated with GMO and the need to counteract their proliferation in Bulgaria. They reached an agreement that urgent action was needed in order to protect their children and Bulgarian nature from what they saw as threats posed by scientific innovations with insufficiently understood long-term effects (pamphlet prepared by bg-mamma). A typical example of the solidarity-building occurring on the site, this struggle stemmed from the private commitment some mothers had made to feed their children with natural and local products as part of a healthy life style. From a personal choice of the individual family and household, in the face of political decisions that reflected on the private lives of the whole nation, this commitment transformed into a fiercely contested political issue. The mothers who took the call for action close to heart gradually became the main driving force of a series of petitions, rallies and public

events such as an open-stage concert and open-air exhibition of anti-GMO post cards prepared by children across the country. Mothers stood in the January cold of 2010, petition and children in hand, waiting for the prime minister to present their demands directly to him. Personal connections were sought and found with Bulgarian scientists and members of the parliamentary committee working on the amendment. Notably, journalists who regularly covered the environmental beat were recruited into the movement and their detailed understanding of how the legislative process works proved essential to the staging of the right moves at the right time.⁸

Some of the most engaged bg-mamma members grew into real activists for the period of the protests writing and editing pamphlets and petitions, chasing politicians, sitting in parliamentary committee meetings as well as in meetings of the civic alliance they managed to form with other civil society organizations.⁹ Although not all mothers supporting the action were involved to the same degree, a majority of them acted, in the words of one informant, as bees collecting information, digging out phone numbers of politicians and specialists, searching their interpersonal networks for links to people to lobby, working with their children to prepare postcards that insisted on the preservation of the natural fruits of the Bulgarian land and so on.¹⁰ Crucially, bg-mamma members managed to draw together a large number of diverse civil society organizations (environmentalist NGOs, agricultural producers' and organic farmers' associations) into a broad civic alliance.

The campaign ended with a victory for the civic alliance led by bg-mamma's activists. The proposed text that was intended to open Bulgaria to GMO was turned down by the parliamentary committee and never entered the parliamentary floor. Regardless of whether this resolution was right or overly protectionist and to what extent it is enforceable and sustainable in the long term, this example demonstrates that the solidarity grown on bg-mamma soil transformed into a major force that allowed Bulgarian civil society to effect results at the level of state politics and policy.

Notably, in the process of the GMO campaign, the bg-mamma site demonstrated that, in the hands of its committed members, it could serve not only as a space for sociable interaction and mutual help, but also as a platform for civic organizing in the strict sense. This involved deliberation and reaching consensus regarding the issue at hand, drafting and vetting of documents that allowed all participating members to select the version they considered to be the strongest; coordination and distribution of tasks to be performed offline such as who would distribute the petition to the offices of which institutions; brainstorming for approaches to the recruitment of popular performers and bands to participate in the public concert along with numerous other smaller and bigger elements of collective action. Informants who had been part of this flurry of activity shared that they had never seen themselves as capable of carry-

ing out such tasks and even being involved in such a civic campaign. However, in bg-mamma they felt responsibility to other members and a pressure to put some action behind their words. So, they gradually started volunteering for small assignments to find themselves running the show at a later point. Certainly, their interaction with other campaign participants could not only be sustained by the bg-mamma forum, but had to be done by phone and in person as well. This fact, along with the multiplicity of public events staged by bg-mamma in city squares and at the doors of high offices powerfully demonstrated the potential of the solidarity built online to spill over into the offline world with significant political effects.

The civic movement that mobilized around the GMO legislation did not stay organized and concentrated on its goals once the concrete issue was resolved. Its networks of relationships and interactions, the channels of communication and the meeting places did not congeal to form an enduring structure. Once that particular legislative change was averted, the immediate goal was considered achieved and no new goals were set to necessitate continuing organized action. In contrast, in an earlier case directed at children with disabilities some of the activists went on to found and formally register non-governmental, non-profit organizations dedicated to the shaping of social policies in that area. These two instances illustrate the possible routes that solidarity constructed online could take with regard to its organizational forms. In the latter case it resulted in a stable civic organization. In the case of the GMO initiative, there was no such stabilization. Nevertheless, I argue that the spontaneous discovery of the model of collective action that this case exemplified left its mark on the culture of the site and the individual subjectivities of its participants. These people had learned that a successful collective action was possible. They saw the site as a resource for such action and themselves as agents who could organize in solidarity if a new civic cause, or unifying issue, would arise down the road.

Discussion: Balancing Community and Commerce

Upon close examination, bg-mamma turns out to be a producer (of online content and offline action) organized at several levels rather than a mere disorganized aggregation of “produsers” (see Olsson, chapter 1 in this volume). Furthermore, the analysis of the structures and practices underlying bg-mamma calls into question the binary opposition between online community and the mainstream (commercial, business) media organization posited in some authoritative texts on new media and user participation such as Castells (1996), Jenkins (2006) Shirky (2008) (see Carpentier 2011). Indeed, following Carpentier’s (2011) argument, I suggest that bg-mamma represents a new type of participatory media organization. It is a virtual organization whose main locus

of production is in cyberspace and whose membership is dispersed, fluid and only tentatively enrolled, but in no way disorganized. I argue that as a new type of media organization bg-mamma combines the characteristics of two distinct paradigms of production: that of the traditional commercial media and that of the commons. The arrangements pertaining to the commercial side of its activities make it part and parcel of the media industry, most notably as one of the players competing for its share of advertising revenue. This revenue secures the reproduction of its materiality – its technical infrastructure, its interface and paid technical and administrative staff in the first place. On the commercial side of its operation, bg-mamma features also the well-known hierarchical cast of characters: owners, share-holders, managers, administrators and marketers. Its organizational goal is attracting large audiences (participants) and selling them to advertisers.¹¹

At the same time, bg-mamma is also a site where practices belonging to the tradition of the commons have organized themselves into specific institutions (see Osborn 1990; McCay 2002) that make possible the sustained reproduction of a common resource, in this case the user-generated information, discussion and mutual help. Osborn (1990) and McCay (2002) emphasize the importance of context, situation and history for the development of institutions of the commons. Bg-mamma's inception as a voluntary community brought together by a shared interest and dedication to mutual aid among mothers has led it to evolve forms of organized sociability based on voluntarily accepted rules and values. The positions and responsibilities taken on by its key players resemble those of community activists, leaders and elders. These community structures have been instrumental in the maintaining of a discipline rooted in the community ethos and freely embraced by participants in their individual conduct.

As a hybrid entity articulating commerce and community, bg-mamma represents a remarkable example in which, for the time being, the goals of the business organization (profit-making) and the goal of the commons (mutual aid) co-exist in a balance. Key actors in the organization construe their roles with different degrees of consideration of this dual structure. The moderators see themselves as community volunteers and organizers oriented predominantly to the commons paradigm. The founders, administrators and co-owners of the site, on the other hand, are focused on the business management side with a clear understanding of the need for reconciliation between the profit imperative and the maintaining of community dynamics as the main engine of content (and user) production. They have successfully mediated between the management structure of the business and the leadership institutions of the community playing a central part in each of them.

Within the broad framework of the institutionalized order of the bg-mamma community one can find multiple smaller and bigger groups of users that have effectively self-organized for different purposes and projects. These groups,

as their charitable and civic initiatives demonstrate, have taken advantage of the possibilities for sociability and solidarity-building presented by the site and have remained largely oblivious of and undisturbed by its commercial nature. Bg-mamma's community affordances have allowed such groups to pursue and achieve goals of their own, not aligned with the business plans, or envisioned by the management. The administrators' stance vis-à-vis such initiatives so far has been one of arm's length detachment and non-interference. In a newspaper interview the two founders compare their mandate with the maintenance of a public park:

We make sure that there are waste baskets, lightning, enough policemen, no pedophiles, and that the trees and other plants are cared for and decorated on festive occasions; all in all, that the place is clean, tidy and comfortable. However, we cannot and do not want to know what is said in the conversations on each bench.¹²

Interestingly, this policy resembles the ideal of editorial objectivity formally embraced by traditional media organizations vis-à-vis the production of journalistic content. Taken seriously by the administrators and held in check by the community institutions, this policy has allowed the diverse user groups and cultures inhabiting bg-mamma to coexist peacefully and productively and to undertake effective organized action within and outside the virtual realm.

The question, then, is for how long and to what extent the arms-length detachment of management from content and interaction could be successfully upheld. The prospect of limiting the freedom of discussion and undermining self organization in particular areas under the pressure of commercial imperatives (such as the interests of major advertisers) is certainly open given the logic of the evolution of bg-mamma's business model. The possibility of intentional manipulation of the user population for commercial or political purposes cannot be ruled out either should the principles and policies underlying the decisions of the business managers and administrators change. It is hard to predict if the users would immediately recognize policy changes potentially limiting their freedom of expression and organizing and how they would respond. Would they remain attached and engaged in the commons, if its products start being enclosed, shaped and appropriated for purely commercial gain? These and many other questions call for watchful stance with regard to bg-mamma's future development on the part of both users and analysts.

For the time being, I suggest that the example of bg-mamma should be seen as a demonstration of the possibility for user creativity and grass-roots mobilization that this new type of media organization has opened up. As an ideal type it takes an intermediary place between the top-down organization controlled by Producers waging power and capital and the free-wheeling creativity of disorganized small-case "producers." Further research should be

dedicated to identifying ways in which the precarious balance between the commercial and the community aspects of its structure could be solidified or transcended through alternative arrangements that ensure material sustainability and flourishing of sociability and solidarity at the same time.

Notes

1. As of December 4, 2011, the site bg-mamma.com features a total of 499 121 thematic forums, 19 469 282 publications, 2192 articles and 182 527 users (<http://www.bg-mamma.com/>)
2. myTechbg, December 22, 2008: <http://mail.devdoor.com/novini/126/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%B-C%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F+%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%B5+%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%B8+bg+mammacom> and interview with Marina Kuzmanova, site founder, October 2, 2010.
3. Interview with Marina Kuzmanova, October 2, 2010.
4. Bg-mamma.com, <http://www.bg-mamma.com/index.php?topic=23317.0>
5. Theme: How did you end up in bg-mamma? <http://www.bg-mamma.com/index.php?topic=519683.0>
6. Interview with Teodora Piralkova, bg-mamma activist, Chair of National Alliance Smile With Me, 6 July, 2010, Sofia.
7. Interview with Slavka Kukova, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee.
8. Interview with Nadalina Aneva, reporter, Newspaper *Sega*, 13 August, 2010, Sofia.
9. Interview with ΠΟ (pseudonym chosen by respondent), bg-mamma member. 29 June, 2010.
10. Bg-mamma theme focused on organizing one of the civic protests against GMO: <http://archives.bg-mamma.com/archive/index.php?topic=482706.msg14518839#msg14518839>
11. NEG performs niche targeting: We know what our users care about. We unite in a group some of the largest online communities sharing common interests and activities. We provide not only a large audience, but also high-quality contact with the right target publics in terms of demographics and context. (See the corporate website for Net Entertainment Group: <http://neg.bg/bg/home#>)
12. *Capital*, 28 May, 2008: http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/obshtestvo/2008/05/30/503928_emancipaciata_na_biberona/

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The Producer as Vendor

Producing Public Space in a Virtual World

Stina Bengtsson

Extensive growth in the number of participants of new commercial media environments, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc., has started a trend where not only corporations, but state organizations, cities, municipalities and NGOs use social networking sites to communicate with their target groups, locally as well as on a global scale (Bennett and Entman 2003; Gordon and Koo 2008). Today, organizations and associations which formerly used other means of communication (from traditional postal services; door knocking; via mass media ads; and later on ICT platforms; such as city web pages, etc.) use social networking media to communicate and interact with their members, citizens, audiences, and consumers. According to David Hesmondhalgh, there is a progressiveness associated with new media, for what reason that few modern organizations, commercial or non-commercial, dare to stay outside these platforms and sites (2007:240; see also Bengtsson 2012). When utilizing the social networking sites these organizations transform from traditional senders into new media producers, as they, besides content, also produce spaces, environments and social events. Given the rapidly transforming media landscape it is likely that we, in the future, will see increasing participation of non-commercial agents in these new media environments. Although there are some examples of studies of the fusion of politics, citizenship and popular culture (c.f. van Zoonen 2005; Riegert 2007), we need to further explore what this means for those involved in its production.

Lately, we have seen a vivid debate on the changing roles of consumers and citizens in interactive, digital media; the way convergence culture has empowered, or cut power from *users* of new media, compared to the previous, mass media-based media landscape. An issue that has been given less attention, however, is what this new media landscape does to the above-mentioned *senders* or *producers*, who use these new media platforms to reach out to their audiences. I will use a case study of the virtual city “Malmö in *Second Life*” to discuss this phenomenon. Malmö existed in the virtual world *Second Life* from

early May 2009 to late February 2010. The Malmö city administration built a virtual copy of a number of In Real Life (IRL) environments in Malmö to establish communication with the inhabitants of the city. But the era of the virtual city was short. The project was heavily criticized, in many different ways, and the virtual city was closed down after only ten months.

With Malmo in *Second Life* as an empirical case, I will discuss how new commercially organized media environments frame the activities of non-commercial producers, and how the much debated transformation of media users and citizens into consumers can go hand in hand with a transformation of producers into vendors. My analysis mainly deals with the relationship between the understandings of the virtual city, among the users of *Second Life* and the city of Malmö, both related to the virtual world as a cultural and commercial environment. These two understandings of the virtual city as place, in combination with other, external factors, obstructed the possibilities of the public administration to establish the kind of communication with the citizens that they had hoped for.

Although there is an increasing amount of democratic work and experimenting going on in new media environments in general (Tumber & Bromley 1998; Bennett and Entman 2003; Jiang & Xu 2009), and also in virtual worlds more specifically (c.f. Gordon and Koo 2008), the Malmo in *Second Life* project is still fairly unique and a case methodology was therefore preferable (Creswell 1998:73 ff). I have used many different kinds of materials to get a broad and deep understanding of the case at hand; interviews, web based material, mass media material, written documents, and also a spatial analysis of the virtual city itself.

Interviews were made with producers: Grethe Linde at Malmö City Hall, who was responsible for executing and administrating the virtual city (from the city's part), and Urban Andersson at Sweden Island, which is the web bureau that built the virtual environment and also helped administrate it. These people are quoted with their own names in the text. I have also talked to, and interviewed, (Swedish) users in *Second Life*, on more or less formal grounds, to try to understand how Malmo in *Second Life* was understood by those who visited the virtual world on a regular basis. These avatars are made anonymous in the text.

There is also a lot of written material to take into account. I have been given copies of Malmö city's application to the European Structure Funds, as well as the final report concluding the project. The written material also includes web-based material, such as blogs used by the Swedish community in *Second Life*, and in-world online magazines that circulate within the Swedish community. Additionally, I have looked for material within mass media to understand the changing discourse of *Second Life* during the period of the Malmo in *Second Life* project, internationally as well as nationally, and more specifically in the

Skåne region in Sweden, where Malmö is located. Finally, I have taken into account the construction of the virtual sims themselves; their aesthetics; environments; functions; events; happenings; and rules.

Citizen, User, Consumer, and Producer Relations and New Media

Since the beginning of the 1990s, we have seen a vivid discussion on the democratic potentials of the Internet (c.f. Olsson 2002; Cammaerts & Carpentier 2007; Couldry, Livingstone & Markham 2007; Dahlgren 2009; Olsson & Dahlgren 2010). Internet supporters have pointed to the many positive dimensions of Internet based democracy, such as its capacity to make information available to the public; to erase social hierarchies and power structures; and to facilitate communication based on equal terms, where many can engage simultaneously in a critical debate about public matters (c.f. Rheingold 1993¹; Dahlberg 1998). Other, more negative voices claim that successively, capitalism has taken over the Internet (Dahlberg 1998; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Fuchs 2011), as well as other parts of society, including civic spheres (Hindess 2002; Dahlgren 2009).²

As noted earlier, we have – during the last decade – also seen a vivid debate about the changing power relations of citizens, consumers and producers, due to new, interactive, web-based media. There are mainly two, largely isolated discourses about these changing roles in research; one about the changing roles and powers of *users as producers* in new, web based media (c.f. Jenkins 2004; 2006; Bruns 2008; Mørk Petersen 2008; Örnebring 2008), and the other about the changing roles of *citizens as consumers* in a new political landscape (c.f. Giroux 1999; Scammel 2000; Keum *et al.* 2004; Clarke & Newman 2007; Ward 2008; Ward 2010).

The debate about the changing roles of users as producers revolves mainly around the role of users in commercially organized, interactive new media. Contributors on the one side put forward the emancipative dimensions of new media technology (Jenkins 2004; 2006). Users, they argue, have conquered the role of producers, and are renamed prod-users (Toeffler 1971; Bruns 2008), gaining power over the media production process, as well as over media content, at the expense of traditional media producers. Others have questioned this positive view and have argued that power relations still remain intact, only less overt (c.f. Carpentier 2003), and that the “prod-users” are used by the media industry (by working without getting a proper payment); describing the audiences’ productions in terms of “loser generated content” (Mørk Petersen 2008), or the users themselves as “producers of what?” (Örnebring 2008). Following these arguments, media users are transformed into simple commodities, or even unpaid slaves (see also Fuchs 2011).

The term citizen-consumer appeared in discussions about the changing political landscape and citizen movements in the late 1990s, and has been used in both optimistic and pessimistic ways since then. In 1999, Henry A. Giroux used the term in a discussion about the commercialization of the American school system, and the transformation of pupils and parents from citizens to consumers. The concept was not elaborated on much at this stage, but had clear negative connotations (Giroux 1999). The year after, it appeared in a more accurately political discussion about the Internet and civic engagement related to political consumerism (Scammel 2000). Here, Margaret Scammel put forward the citizen-consumer as an important political agent, stating “it is no longer possible to cut the deck neatly between citizenship and civic duty, on one side, and consumption and self-interest, on the other” (Scammel 2000:352). Over the years, the citizen-consumer concept has appeared in political, and media, research debates in positive (c.f. Keum *et al.* 2004; Ward 2008), negative (Giroux 1999; Clarke and Newman 2007) and more neutral (Ward 2010) terms. This debate is linked to a much larger discussion about the increasing commercialization of society at large (c.f. Couldry 2010), the Internet (Hesmondhalgh 2007; Fuchs 2011) and the rise of a consumer society (Baudrillard 1970/1998; Ritzer 1999) or a “consumption life” (Bauman 2008).

From these two debates we learn, firstly, that in a consumer society, media users and citizens, as well as pupils and parents, are addressed as consumers and – secondly – that they also learn to act as such, to, for example, reach their individual, or collective, political goals. It is also obvious that many public authorities want to appear in these commercial new media arenas in order to avoid being regarded as boring and old fashioned (c.f. Bengtsson 2012) which in turn leads to an increasing commercialization of public space (cf. Massey 2005). The fact that governments, like the Swedish one, actively support Facebook and other commercial networking sites as arenas for political struggles, is but one example of this.³

Although there are good reasons for questioning the empowering outcomes of using digital media, as pointed out by Mørk Petersen (2008), Örnebring (2008), Fuchs (2011) and others, and to highlight the decreasing powers of the citizen-consumer as compared with the traditional citizen (Giroux 1999), there can be general positive dimensions of “prod-user’s” power, especially when they conquer the power of global media corporations that turn human actions into commodities, sell their audiences to advertisers and put the profit of their users “work” in their own pockets. But what does this transformation of producer-consumer relations, and the commercialization of space, mean for small, financially weak producers, such as municipalities, trying to establish communication with their citizen and raise political engagement among young people?

Producing Civic Space Online

Although both the above referred discussions about changing user and citizen positions are important vantage points for a discussion about the experiences of the producer Malmö city in a commercial, new media environment, it is, nevertheless, important to note that this varied debate about the changing positions, roles and behaviours of users, citizens and consumers has not been accompanied by a corresponding discussion of the role of producers in the very same landscape. According to Ross (2010) there is a division in the debate about new media producers, dealing on the one hand with the professional, institutional, producers, and on the other hand the "narcissistic amateurs" (Ross 2010). With Malmö in *Second Life* and other similar projects we see a new emerging group of media producers: municipalities; libraries; schools; etc., that use social networking sites as platforms for the production of their own environments and events.

When Malmö city established its presence in *Second Life*, it was simultaneously consumer and producer. It was a consumer since it bought land from the publisher of *Second Life*, Linden Lab, and regularly paid rent for the right to use it. At the same time, it was a producer as it was involved in the construction of sims and also produced events that took place there. My focus will be on Malmö's role as producer of virtual space for its citizens, and on how the media environment that was chosen as the platform for this civic experiment – with its strong culture and commercial character – affected the role of the public institution.

Malmö is not the first city to use *Second Life* for civic projects. In their article "Placeworlds: Using Virtual Worlds to Foster Civic Engagement", Gordon and Koo (2008) present a successful example of the use of *Second Life* for democratic experimenting. They refer to a project in Boston, USA, that used *Second Life* in order to "strengthen the ability of neighbourhood residents to create meaningful places" (ibid.:205). A placeworld is a subgroup of the Habermasian lifeworld that is organized around a shared understanding of place. Thus, it emerges when people share a common understanding of place, when a group brings a place into shared relevance. Gordon and Koo argue that multi-user virtual environments (MUVEs) enable local groups to strengthen their expression and experience of place. To be successful they engage not just single individuals but coherent groups capable of taking action together. In their development of the concept, Gordon and Koo's point of departure is a phenomenological tradition of understanding place as experienced space (c.f. Tuan 1977; Malpas 1999), in which "space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan 1977:6). Place is here regarded as fixed in time, a fixity that allows for the true nature of place to come forward. This spatial perspective has been criticized from both materialist Marxist and

Post-Structuralist directions, for being too nostalgic, static, and unaware of the power relations and hierarchies built into space. This critique argues that the character of a place cannot be fixed and separated from the movements of time, and is negotiated in relation to different situations: unique and generated by a crossing of trajectories in time and space, always political, never neutral (Massey 2005:141; see also Lefebvre 1974/1991:91). Massey (1993) puts forward four dimensions of place that are important for the understanding of Malmö's civic experiment, and the lack of shared understanding among producers and users of the islands: its non-static character, its links to the outside, and the open boundaries of places to the external world.⁴ She also argues that places do not have single identities but are often defined by conflict, and lastly that each place "is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations" (ibid.:66 ff; Massey 2005:163 ff).

I argue that a shared understanding of place, of the kind that Gordon and Koo (2008) found in Boston, was never created in the Malmö case. The two different groups of people in focus here, producers and users of the virtual city, understood Malmö in *Second Life* as a place differently. To grasp the lack in shared understanding of place, I will look at the spatial and temporal connections of Malmö in *Second Life* as constructed by these two groups; how the producers and users respectively articulated its connections, trajectories and links; and the meaning of these articulations in a wider context, especially related to the commercial character of *Second Life* as an environment. The next part of the text will present a brief history of Malmö in *Second Life*.

Malmö in *Second Life*: Ten Months in a Virtual World

Malmö had worked intensively and been experimenting for a couple of years with new technology to develop the city's democracy, and was also rewarded the title "ICT-city of the year 2005"⁵, in competition with two other Swedish cities. Shortly after that, the "Swedish Embassy" in *Second Life*, correctly *the Second House of Sweden*, was launched (cf. Bengtsson 2011). Inspired by this, local politicians in Malmö came up with the idea to establish a virtual city in *Second Life* for the benefit of its citizens and local democracy. They decided to call their virtual city *Malmö in Second Life*.

The virtual city was part of "Service meetings in the Future", a larger vision of how new technologies would bring the citizens in Malmö closer to the city administration and to each other, and planned to include extended digital services; a call centre; a citizens office (where the inhabitants of Malmö anonymously could get help with social and city matters); and other extended services. All of these localities and services were supposed to be developed and administrated in *Second Life* and IRL simultaneously.

In 2007, the Malmö city administration applied for 803,100 Swedish crowns (approx. 80,000 Euro) from the European Structure Funds and the Swedish agency Nutek⁶ to develop the project *City of Malmö, a virtual municipality/ Malmö stad, Virtuellt medborgarkontor*.⁷ On top of this Malmö city invested 300,000 Swedish crowns (approx. 30,000 Euro) of the city budget. The project aimed at “increasing the accessibility of, and usefulness of, information technology to strengthen the competitiveness and employment of the region”.⁸ The ideas behind the project were further developed in the application:

There are many reasons for realizing the idea of a virtual Citizen's Office. The main reason is capturing young people's to capture young people's interest in politics, and delivering services in an environment that's known to them. Previous studies say that young people have little to no knowledge of what a municipality is, how it is structured with its political basis. Since Malmö is working with developing eDemocracy, the virtual Citizen's Office is in line with reaching out with information and knowledge.

The application further specifies that:

Malmö City's goal is to be breaking edge when it comes to technological development, as well as our permanent task; reaching out with services and information to citizens of all age groups. To satisfy them all, the demands on fast, simple, reliable and individual service becomes increasingly important. To reach out with information and services, especially to younger generations, there are additional demands on packaging messages in new venues. [...] The target group of this project is mainly young adults, 18-30 years old.

Seven to eight new clerks were supposed to be hired to staff and administrate the Real Life and *Second Life* institutions simultaneously. The city of Malmö engaged the Internet bureau Sweden Island to build and develop the *Second Life* sims, and to take care of the technological issues.

Although, in the time between the project started and the virtual city was launched something unexpected and unpredictable happened: a worldwide financial crisis. In November 2008 the world market fell apart and completely changed the economic base for this kind of civic experimenting. The ambitions of the project thus had to be limited, but as the agreement with NUTEK was still there, and Malmö had already received the money, they had to fulfil their part of the contract, with some necessary changes.

Consequently, much of the initial plans had to be reconsidered. Instead of having full time administration and staff present in *Second Life* from nine in the morning to nine in the evening, only 35 % of the work hours of one person at the City Hall were left for the entire project, besides of course the work done by Sweden Island. The initially grandiose plans ended up as a virtual meeting point with little back up. Grethe Lindhe at the Malmö City Hall commented on

this situation in the following terms: “We’ll see if can make it work, if we in any way can establish some kind of communication with the citizens in a different way” (Grethe Lindhe, personal interview, October 12th 2009).

Malmö city is familiar with creating meeting points for their inhabitants: skateboard ramps for the young, parks for the old, and a library for all of them; but building in this kind of context was new to them.

In February 2009 the first parts of Malmö in *Second Life* (some virtual islands that had been inherited from the former vivid Second Sweden community) opened, and on May 6th 2009 the newly built Malmö environments were officially inaugurated. From this date and until the virtual city was formally closed down, several different events took place in Malmö in *Second Life*, both arranged by Malmö city and on initiatives by the Swedish community in *Second Life*. In February 2010, after a big farewell party, the Malmö in *Second Life* era ended.

In-world and Out-world Criticisms

Malmö city’s democratic experimenting in *Second Life* was not as successful as the Boston example referred to earlier, and when trying to understand the construction of Malmö in *Second Life* as place, many aspects have been taken into account. I will start by putting forward the different kinds of criticisms that were posed towards the project, and will later on look deeper into the different contexts in relation to which the virtual city was understood. The project was heavily criticized, primarily along two lines: criticism that took place outside *Second Life*, mainly in the mass, and new media, and in-world criticism that was raised among the users of *Second Life*.

First and foremost the out-world criticism dealt with the choice of entering *Second Life* at that time (“too late”) and the amount of money spent on the project (“too expensive”). The first kind of criticism was mainly represented in readers’ comments in Swedish mainstream media, especially in the local and regional press in southern Sweden (where Malmö is located), but also in readers’ comments in more specialized magazines, such as *Computer Sweden*, a Swedish national magazine covering new technologies and computer issues; as well as in the blogosphere. These comments varied from unarticulated outbursts such as “Hahaha, biggest joke of the day”⁹, to more detailed criticisms, such as:

“Fail of the day! Malmö City opens in... Second Life?!

Sometimes it’s good when local politicians try to keep up with the latest techniques. Sometimes it is not. Malmö City announced that they will host a house warming party in Second Life today. Classic Internet expression: Fail! If you don’t know what Second Life is, don’t feel bad. It’s a virtual world that was almost cool when it was launched in 2003.

Today, Second Life does indeed have a few million users worldwide, but it's hardly something cool. Or hot. Or anything. On paper it often sounds cool, since you can start businesses there, become a rock star, build new things, realize your dreams and so on, but in reality it's just a terribly ugly 3D-world largely filled with porn and casino commercials, hopeless to navigate in.

I hope you haven't spent too much on this, Malmö... Maybe this year's weirdest Internet project! :-)

Update: Malmö has wasted 800,000 crowns on this! Congratulations.
(<http://blogg.tkj.se>. May 5th 2009)

The second kind of out-world criticism, dealing with the finances of the project, came from many different actors. The amount of money spent on *Second Life* was mentioned in newspaper articles, television news items and in several of the readers' and viewers' comments in mainstream media, as well as in many blogs. One example is a reader of the local newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* who commented on an article about the inauguration of Malmö in *Second Life*.

1.2 million for this crap? What's that? Like 100,000 crowns per person visiting the crap after the opening? SL was, just like Twitter, for instance, something that the media hyped to death and glorified even though no one really used/uses it in real life. Everyone involved in this project should immediately be fired for SEVERE incompetence! What where you thinking?

(Guttis May 6th 2009)

The in-world criticism mainly focussed on two things; firstly that the city of Malmö didn't devote enough attention to the project, not fully realizing the potentials of the medium ("too little engagement"); and secondly that the virtual city didn't offer its visitors enough ("too boring"). The first kind of in-world criticism came from avatars that were very engaged in the future of *Second Life*. The in-world magazine *Slainthe*, driven by members of the Swedish community in *Second Life*, eagerly discussed the topic throughout the period of the project. In the first 2009 issue it was addressed in the following terms:

Malmö – to be or not to be, that is the question?

Is there political will?

What happens on Malmö? Or what doesn't happen? More and more of the inhabitants of Second Life's Swedish areas ask themselves this question. At this magazine's editorial office, we've noticed the increasing discontent and astonishment concerning how the activities are handled at the three Malmö sims.
[...]

"Where is Rosengård¹⁰ with all its inhabitants and problems in Second Life?"

"Where are the schools of Malmö?"

"Where is the culture?"

“Where are all the associations and unions?”

“Where is the unemployment office?”

“Where is the police and other social features?”

Slainthe no 1, 2009

(http://www.xroad.co.uk/Slainthe_1_2009.pdf)

The other kind of in-world criticism, “the too boring criticism”, came from other regular users of *Second Life* and made clear that a presence in *Second Life* generated expectations from users that conflicted with the resources and intentions of Malmö. A blog frequented by members of the Swedish community in *Second Life* contained a post answering the question of why Malmö in *Second Life* failed:

They should have inserted some residences too, so that people can rent them to a reasonable price. It gets more crowded then. Shops and a traditional community park with fun activities, and it needs a dance floor too. Also, if they could arrange some type of treasure hunt or other kinds of contests that draws people there? Something like a boat race? Preferentially some streets to facilitate driving, that’s usually appreciated. There are a million things you can do, and it doesn’t have to be expensive. It’s all about getting people there!

Grethe Lindhe, at Malmö City Hall, addressed the same kind of issue but from another angle:

The problem with these things, as I see it, is that the avatars, who go there regularly, expect almost like a full-time service with entertainment seven days a week. And that’s just not something we can do, we don’t have that kind of time to spend.

(Grethe Lindhe, personal interview, October 12th 2009)

Producing Public Space in a New Media Environment

Against the background of these different kinds of criticism, I would like to put forward some explanations to why Malmö in *Second Life* was so heavily criticized, especially among its users; and how the new platform for communication with citizens did not work out the way the Malmö city administration had hoped. The first dimension is the global media hype around *Second Life* in mainstream media, which inspired many public as well as commercial agents, apart from Malmö, to establish a presence in the virtual world (Kücklich 2009; Bengtsson 2011; Bengtsson 2012). Due to the rapidly shifting media landscape, the discourse on *Second Life* at the time of the inauguration of Malmö in *Second Life* had turned from the positive and affirmative kind from a couple of years ago, to negative or even scornful. It is likely that the many critical voices argu-

ing against the project kept several potential users from visiting the virtual city. The Malmö city administration had little information about who actually visited the sim (due to the anonymity of the virtual world); whether the visitors came from Malmö; the Skåne region; other parts of Sweden; or elsewhere, but they seem to have had visitors from all over the world (Grethe Lindhe, personal interview, October 12th 2009). Consequently, many visitors were already familiar with the virtual world and its culture, while the Malmö city administration was rather unfamiliar with the cultures of *Second Life*. As many researchers have pointed out: one of the most noticeable characteristics of virtual worlds in general and *Second Life* in particular is the creativity and playfulness built into its everyday life (Castronova 2007; Boellstorff 2008; Gordon and Koo 2008; Kücklich 2009; Pearce and Artemesia 2009). This playfulness is not exclusively articulated in the creation of events and happenings, but also in the constant construction (and re-construction) of buildings, environments and spaces in the virtual world. This is also connected to the “bottom-up” culture of *Second Life*; where the publisher, Linden Lab, only offers space and regulates action and consumption, whereas the content, both environments and events, is left for the users themselves to create and organize. To succeed in engaging citizens in a *Second Life* project, Gordon and Koo (2008) conclude that true community involvement needs to be based on some kind of imminent redesign and development (2008:216). Since the Malmö sims were constructed to look like Malmö (IRL), to be recognized as Malmö by its citizens, they remained static during their time online. This fixity of the sims actually counteracted one of the core elements of virtual culture, and especially the cultures of *Second Life*. The executive web bureau Sweden Island, hired by Malmö to build and administrate the virtual city, of course organized events and happenings, but the resources to work continually with the project were too limited, and didn’t keep up with the engagement of the passionate amateur producers working with other sims – something the Malmö administration got complaints about:

Some think that it’s really nice, and some that it’s so damn boring, and, like, “no, there’s nothing going on here”, “come on, make things happen”. I mean, I believe that if I had had someone who could spend their time administrating it. To make a concert happen. Like, that would have been wonderful. Because I think we would have had great, great possibilities.

(Grethe Lindhe, personal interview, October 12th 2009).

Since creating land in *Second Life* is free, relatively easy (for those who have the skills) and regarded by many as the key factor of the virtual world (c.f. Pearce and Artemesia 2009), the amount of land is huge. As a consequence, *Second Life* has often been criticized for offering a large amount of dead space, but not enough people to socialize with. Because of this, a status hierarchy has evolved, in which a large amount of sim traffic is attractive and worth to

strive for. To gain this desirable traffic, sim owners sometimes offer their land to others; for courses, concerts, parties, etc., for free. Thus, to offer a stagnant meeting point, with few events and things to do, as Malmö city mainly did, gave them less status in *Second Life*. This is exemplified by a user interview where the avatar expresses frustration about the lack of activities on the Malmö sims, and what she perceives as a malfunction of Malmö in *Second Life*:

Interviewer: But do you mean that they should have acted differently?

Avatar: The people responsible at Malmö failed to understand that they had to fill it up with content.

Avatar: And that's my point.

Avatar: Oh, yes.

[...] Avatar: They simply created a basic platform [...] of the same kind that we have million and one of here.

(Anonymous avatar, chat interview, February 3rd 2011)

This lack of event-making on the Malmö sims seems perfectly natural when considering the more ordinary activities of Swedish municipalities, but seems odd compared to how many other sim owners handle their environments and events.

The last dimension to consider is anonymity, something often regarded as part of the specificity of online life (c.f. Turkle 1984). Although the anonymity of the virtual world was one of Malmö's initial reasons for entering the online platform, it later on became a problem due to the regulations of public communication that Swedish municipalities have to obey. Some members of the Swedish community offered to help Malmö city arrange events on the Malmö sims; to make the place more alive and attractive, and wanted to get paid for it. They claim to have been turned down, as doing business with anonymous avatars was impossible for the municipality.

Avatar: Some of us offered them help.

[...]

Avatar: To work on it.

Avatar: Part time.

Interviewer: What did they answer you?

Avatar: For a small sum of money.

Avatar: Not interesting.

Avatar: Because we weren't identifiable.

Interviewer: Because..?

Avatar: I only exist here.

Interviewer: Identifiable? As in if the could identify you?

Avatar: My mistress in RL, who pays for this whole show, isn't here.

Avatar: She wants to be anonymous.

Interviewer: Aba. They could not do business with avatars?

Avatar: And it works perfectly fine, to only be an avatars, and live an active life in relation to those kinds of organizations.

Avatar: Like Malmö.

Avatar: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Absolutely. But what was the problem for Malmö?

Interviewer: That there were no RL persons?

Avatar: [I'm] in contact with a company that could have intermediated.

Interviewer: But that wasn't interesting?

Avatar: Their lawyers put the squeeze on them [saying] that they had to handle our e-mails just like anyone else's.

Interviewer: What did that mean?

Avatar: The principle of public access to official records, and putting it in the official diary records.

Situating Space Production

Meeting citizens in a new media environment like *Second Life* can obviously be a fruitful way to experiment with civic participation, as in the Boston project described by Gordon and Koo (2008). That project was limited in time and space, and specifically took advantage of the creativity of the virtual world. To infuse the virtual space in a more long-term communication between city administration and citizens, like Malmö tried to do, was less successful.

At this time I would like to return to the earlier discussion of space and especially focus on the different understandings of the virtual city as place among producers and users. The discursive conflict between these two groups, about what Malmö in *Second Life* really was, is a clue to understanding why Malmö city never really reached out to its users and how that affected their position as producers of space in the virtual world.

To understand a place, and the conflicts concerning its nature, it is important to consider the links and trajectories that connect it to other places and contexts, and how it is understood by different groups. For the Malmö city administration, Malmö in *Second Life* was "frankly a new meeting point within Malmö city" as Grethe Lindhe put it (personal interview, October 12th 2009). Accordingly, it was the city of Malmö and the Skåne region that they regarded as the geographical, and cultural, context of the virtual islands.

Additionally, this spatial contextualization of the virtual city was intertwined with the temporal structure of the city of Malmö (IRL), which has a long history, memories and, not least, a long term future. For the producers, Malmö in *Second Life* was part of a larger city context where Malmö, with its industrial, mainly working class, background, and its transformation towards a lively

culturally diversified present and assumed future, was part of their understanding of the place. According to that contextualization, the municipality worked with the virtual meeting point in the same way as they did with other meeting points in the city, and did not create events and entertainment according to the expectations of the users of the virtual world. Due to this framing (Goffman 1974) of the virtual meeting point *within* Malmö city rather than in the virtual world, the producers expected an engagement from the visitors of the virtual sims that was equal to the long-term engagement that people would have for their home town.

Although there were regular users of *Second Life* that were very much engaged in Malmö's *Second Life* project, who felt frustrated by what they regarded a low intensity engagement from the city hall, this engagement was connected to an engagement in *Second Life* as such, rather than in Malmö as a city of-line. The blog post quoted earlier (p.174) where the avatar suggested loads of entertainment, contests, roads and shops to make Malmö in *Second Life* more attractive to users, it underscores that the improvements of the Malmö islands, suggested by the avatar, came from experiences made in *Second Life*; of other sim owners success in the virtual world (in terms of attracting visitors) rather than other ways of engaging citizens made by Swedish municipalities.

The spatial dimensions of place are also connected with temporal rhythms (cf. Lefebvre 2004); the temporal trajectories of place (Massey 2005). Here the different framings of the two understandings of Malmö in *Second Life* as place, among the producers and users respectively, thus also included temporal differences. Malmö city's communication with its citizens is an ongoing process in which Malmö in *Second Life* was just one platform among many others. The avatars' spatial contextualization of Malmö in *Second Life* within *Second Life*, rather than in the world outside, generated temporal expectations that were adjusted to earlier experiences of sims as temporary, shifting and eventful, and in relation to this the activities of Malmö in *Second Life* seemed infrequent or even absent. To the users, the Malmö sims were just one place among thousands of others in a huge virtual world. This discursive conflict of the spatial and temporal understanding of Malmö in *Second Life* also included the virtual world's commercial character, exemplified by the demand for shops in the blog comment quoted earlier, and in the interview with Grethe Lindhe, where she claims that:

We've said that in Malmö, that we don't want that. It's like, we don't want to run it commercially, because that could turn out negative too. So we've said that, no, we don't want any shops where you can buy stuff, that's something they will have to do elsewhere.

(Grethe Lindhe, personal interview, October 12th 2009)

This discussion reveals that the producer of the sims, the city administration of Malmö, and the users of them, i.e. the regular visitors of *Second Life*, did

not have a shared understanding of the location, or the relevance or meaning of the place at hand. The different understandings regarding both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the virtual city, in relation to the contexts through which they were understood, explain why no shared idea of place, and thus no real communication, was established.

The Producer as Vendor in a New Media Environment

The conflict regarding Malmö in *Second Life* as place remained during its time online. The Malmö city administration saw the virtual islands as a public place in Malmö; non-commercial and open, like a library, a park or a refurbished square. In the virtual world they met various reactions: from engaged users who wanted to help out and work with the virtual environment, to those who asked for entertainment and wanted to be amused. I have argued that this communicative deficit came from a lack of shared ideas about the virtual island as place, resulting in a lack of common incentive to work together to develop it. The next issue to discuss is what this lack of spatial understanding of the virtual city meant for Malmö's role as new media producer?

As a new media environment, *Second Life* offered many opportunities for Malmö city: a brand new arena to act on, possibilities to create new space for activities and events, and a new channel for reaching out to citizens. It was also a way to keep up with the title "ICT city of the year" and show off the city's progressiveness in relation to new technologies. Still, external factors and bad luck, perhaps in combination with low strategic skills on the media arena, changed the initial plans for a new virtual city.

From the standpoint of my earlier discussion on the transformation of, not only users, but also producers, it is also important to point to some negative aspects of the Malmö in *Second Life* project, that are connected to *Second Life* as a new media arena, and its commercial and cultural character.

Compared to other kinds of citizen activities that Malmö city arranges IRL, on the municipality's own property; *Second Life* is run by a commercial company, which frames the activities that take place there. For many users, this framing of Malmö in *Second Life*, within *Second Life*, overshadowed other dimensions of the project.

Two aspects can be put forward: firstly that many users generally saw the virtual space as an arena for mainly entertainment (something that many researchers have already concluded). *Second Life* holds many different underground cultures and is (mainly) amateur based, although many commercial businesses and non-commercial organizations established presence there for a short period of time in the mid 2000's, and some are still there. This means that the norm of action is that of the amateur: passionate, engaged, quick, and

informal. Secondly, that a traditional city-citizen relationship between producers and users of Malmo in *Second Life* was never established. Even those among the avatars who wanted more civic engagement in *Second Life* expected another kind of relationship to the city of Malmö, than the traditional relations between city and citizens. The engaged avatar quoted earlier, who belonged to a group that had offered Malmö city help with running the islands, claimed that they wanted to get paid for their engagement in the city; an odd request in the context of city-citizen relations. Rather, completing a task and getting paid for it has more in common with the relation between employer and employee, and this highlights the non-public character of the virtual world.

This lack of citizens on the Malmo islands in *Second Life* has many dimensions. Firstly, it is likely that many of the users were not from Malmö, or even the Skåne region. One of the major characteristics of virtual geographies are their spatial proximity (Kalay & Marx 2005), where distance and nearness work differently than IRL; places in *Second Life* can easily be reached from all over the globe (where there is proper supply of internet connections). Secondly, many of the users are producers themselves; they have their own land where they engage in the production of space and happenings, and they do not need public organizations or commercial businesses to provide that for them, as is often necessary IRL. The great variety of places in *Second Life*, all easily reached from wherever you are, leaves an immense variety of places to choose from that offer more fun, more people, and more events than the Malmö islands ever did. In this culture of amateur production, Malmö city never gained the position they needed to communicate. Here, the changed power relations between producers and consumers in the new media landscape, as discussed by many (c.f. Jenkins 2004; Jenkins 2006; Carpentier 2003), turned out to decrease the power of the city of Malmö in the role as new media producer. The attempts made by Malmö city, to discuss common matters, were easily turned down by many users of Malmo in *Second Life*, to the benefit of other events elsewhere in the virtual world.

This lack of citizens, but presence of engaged users in *Second Life*, connects back to the debate about the changing power relations in new media. Sometimes, it is argued that political consumerism is increasing and that citizens can, and today are more willing to, use their consumer power to act politically (c.f. Scammel 2000). From the example of Malmo in *Second Life* we can conclude that people must *feel* like citizens, to be able to act as such, and that most visitors of Malmo in *Second Life* did not think of themselves as citizens when online. The sum of *citizens* in a community constitutes that community; citizens construct the society they live in and elect the representatives of the community at large. Citizens have obligations and duties, as well as rights and privileges, and are supposed to engage in, and take responsibility for, the community (country, city or region) where their citizenry is located. Customers

are, on the other hand, looking for fulfilment of individual desires and needs (even when political), and form a quickly moving target to reach out to, attract and persuade; rather than a counterpart that stays, to engage in mutual work, debate the future of the community, and discuss common matters. Customers, unlike citizens, are always right and are free to choose another product if the one offered does not match their expectations. The citizen-consumer, as well as the customer, is free to stay and engage, or leave for another place according to his/her own preferences.

Malmö city wanted to benefit from virtual technology to communicate with their citizens. New media technologies, thus, do not exist in a vacuum; they host people who must be willing to act as citizens for the democratic potential of technology to flourish. Participants in *Second Life* are offered a variety of entertainment daily, easily reached and free to take part in (although new, spectacular, outfits that can be bought in the many market places are often required); leaving little incitements to visit a static, low-intense, Swedish island where not much happens. Malmö city acted as a public institution but were regarded as a producer of virtual space, just like thousands of others in *Second Life*. In the future, it's likely that we will see an increasing production of public space in commercial media environments and, following that, an increasing commercialization of public space. Therefore, it is important to critically discuss what producing spaces and events in those kinds of environments means to the public agencies that use them; and what it means for communication about democracy in general. Instead of meeting citizens, the Malmö city administration met a vital and changing underground culture, with users that were accustomed to being producers themselves, and being addressed as, and behaving as, customers. In this context Malmö city turned into a vendor; a salesperson; selling something that very few users of *Second Life* wanted to buy.

Notes

1. See also Rheingold 2000 for a rethinking of these thoughts.
2. Hindess (2002) even argues that a new kind of "neoliberal citizenship" is emerging, especially in the developing countries, due to the globalization, or westernization, of citizenship and its administration.
3. Christensen, Christian quoted in Rosén, Hans (2011) "Forskare: glöm inte att Facebook är ett bolag". Ur *Dagens Nyheter*, October 26, 2011.
4. For a similar perspective on the importance of links and trajectories of space see also Lefebvre (1974/1991:45).
5. Årets IT-kommun 2005.
6. Department for the development of the industry/Verket för näringslivsutveckling.
7. A virtual municipality and a "Virtuellt medborgarkontor" (virtual citizens office is the exact translation) are actually different things as organizing citizens offices is just one of many things that a municipality does.
8. Skåne in southern Sweden.
9. Dduck commenting on an article in *Computer Sweden* on 7 May 2009.

10. Rosengård is a disadvantageous suburb in Malmö, that has more or less become a symbol of segregation, unemployment, drug problems, as well as other problem in the Malmö area.

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The Civic Potential of the Digital Horse

Anna Lund

The Stable is a world in pink and purple. It is a digital community whose content takes participants' – mostly girls and young women – interest in animals as its point of departure. It enables members to navigate between designing stables, training horses and taking care of crops. The website is highly reliant on written text as well as visual images. The members can publish their own short stories, launch newspapers (or magazines) and establish photo galleries. The members can also join digital horse competitions, enter a marketplace for digital horses and horse products as well as initiate discussions on horse-related topics. But they can also – and this is the focus of the present chapter – discuss issues such as intimate relations, institutional experiences and politics.

There is an ongoing debate among representatives for The Swedish Government and researchers concerning young people and their possibly diminishing opportunities to develop democratic competences. This concern is based on the fact that young people's interest in becoming involved in political youth associations and non-profit organizations has declined (cf. Putnam 2000; Dahlgren 2008:153; Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs 2011:17). At the same time, research shows that young people in Europe spend a great deal of their free time in virtual rooms, foremost on entertainment and lifestyle websites (CivicWeb 2009, D16).

In the search for potential sites for democratic activity, it might be particularly useful to look at virtual rooms for entertainment and lifestyle, as they are of central importance in young people's everyday lives. Because even if their interest in traditional political arenas has decreased, this does not have to mean that there is "no investment of 'ordinary people' in social life" (Hermes and Dahlgren 2006:260). It has been stressed from a cultural studies perspective that "informed discussion and formal participation cannot be understood as the only significant domains when it comes to citizenship as lived practice" (ibid.). The popular media are one domain in which historical and contemporary problems can be worked through (ibid.). Today, when the social world has

become “more and more media dominated” (Stern 2008:114), young citizens are likely to use different digital communities to reflect upon themselves, how to deal with others’ opinions, what to be critical of and how to be critical of it.

What I found during my visits to *The Stable* was that this online community seems to be a space for social criticism and democratic integration, as well as a space for dealing with entertainment and lifestyle issues. Although the members do not know each other in real life, they start discussions on issues that transcend their interest in horses in a respectful and responsible way, revealing what I call civic potential. The *purpose* of the chapter is to illuminate the civic potential of the digital horse, and the fact that girls and young women discuss things and have feelings for each other out of principle rather than experience. I will show how civic potential is expressed and why. My intention here is to consider what there is to learn from a digital context that gives rise to such a potential.

Values and Practices

My aim is to illustrate how the hopes underlying the ideals of the civil sphere – conceptualized as a “world of values and institutions that generates the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time” (Alexander 2006:4) – can be observed in an online community targeting girls and young women with an interest in horses. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, the civil sphere is not a variety of associations in which citizens in a democratic society are active during their spare time. Nor is it a discussion that emphasizes the fact that civil society differs from the state, the market and the family’s intimate sphere. Understood from the perspective of cultural sociology, the civil sphere is an activating symbolic structure of meaning and emotion. Such a sphere “relies on solidarity, on feelings for others whom we do not know but whom we respect out of principle, not experience, because of our putative commitment to a common secular faith” (Alexander 2006:4). In modern life there are also belief systems, and Alexander introduces “the idea of democracy as a way of life” (ibid.) – not as a “game governed by technical rules” but by expectations and feelings, and sacred and profane values concerning what is good and bad (ibid.). In Alexander’s conceptualization of the civil sphere, societies are not “governed by power alone and are not fueled only by the pursuit of self-interest. Feelings for others matter, and they are structured by the boundaries of solidarity” (2006:3). In the present case, this activating symbolic structure of meaning and emotion is placed inside a virtual stable, which forms the empirically observed boundaries of solidarity. In order for values such as solidarity to be enhanced, practices are needed that create a culture in which difference and social critique are allowed and in which respectful interaction based on

respect for others out of principle not experience is maintained. I will now turn to Peter Dahlgren (2008) and his notion of a circuit of civic culture. Both Alexander and Dahlgren deal with values and practices, but their emphases are different. Alexander has a more overarching perspective, while Dahlgren's ideas help me develop an understanding of what the girls and young women in *The Stable* are actually doing. He presents the concrete dimensions to look for if one wishes to study the (re)production of values. *Affinity* is one of the dimensions presented by Dahlgren. It suggests that a sense of commonality is needed and that a shared belonging, such as an interest in horses, is agreed upon despite individual and group differences. Affinity can also create trust. Another dimension of a civic culture is *knowledge*. In *The Stable*, it is clear that the ongoing member practice of reading, writing and interpreting visual images can strengthen practical knowledge that is useful in a democratic society. *Practices* – for example how to manage discussions (to initiate them, to explore the scope of an argument, listen to other people's arguments and ask for clarifications and sources behind a statement and so forth) – is also a dimension required in a civic culture, as is the dimension of *identities*. Identities are understood in the plural sense of the word, meaning that “we carry within us different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules and roles for different circumstances” (Dahlgren 2008:159). Thus, being a girl or young woman who is interested in horses is one of many roles and interests in life. Finally, if we include *values* as the first dimension, we find *discussion* as the sixth dimension of the circuit of civic culture. According to Dahlgren, it is “through discussion – or, more simply, talk – that much of the substance of the other dimensions becomes actualized, circulated and reinforced” (2008:159). It is important for me to link Dahlgren's dimension of discussion to Alexander's notion of the ideals of the civil sphere, because discussions can be awakened by internal, but still guiding, cultural values.

Looking for the Civic among Young People

It is easy to misunderstand entertainment and lifestyle sites such as *The Stable* as being filled with negative social forces that promote shallow interests and stimulate capitalist interests. But a media phenomenon, even if it is commercial, can stand for many things simultaneously. As a consequence, there may be platforms we do not acknowledge that serve as bearers of potential for social criticism and democratic integration (van Zoonen 2005). This is probably because, as Alexander puts it, we are “underestimating the civil sphere's potential for relative autonomy from the interests of any particular social group” (2006:276).

In my search for previous research on civic cultures among young people in the virtual world, I have chosen two examples. The first example is the research

project *CivicWeb: Young people, the Internet and Civic Participation*, in which researchers investigated if and how the internet promotes young people's civic engagement and participation. The other example is Anders Svensson's research (Svensson 2007; 2009; 2010) and findings on civic practices and values in the fan community of HV71, an elite hockey club.

The research project *CivicWeb* (2006-2009) mapped out the use of civic websites among young people (between 15 and 25 years) in seven European countries. The project analyzed whether the Internet can help re-engage "young people in the public sphere" and create "new forms of political and civic culture among young people" (CivicWeb D17:10). The project found that young people visiting civic websites, in a European context, represent only about 10 percent of an age cohort (CivicWeb D8:6) and that the "internet is generally more effective as a tool for those who are already engaged than as a means of connecting with those who are excluded" (CivicWeb 2009a:1).

One recommendation emerging from the project's analysis is that civic websites addressing youth must take the non-homogenous character of young people into account. Otherwise civic websites will mainly attract highly educated, already politically active young people and/or those who have a technological habitus. The "significant characteristic of the civic and political engagement among the participants" in the CivicWeb project concerns "predominantly issues of immediate proximity for the participants: individual and group identities, particularly linked to a sense of discrimination, and current life situation are key" (D16:6).

The researchers from the CivicWeb project do not conclude that the Internet "*per se* is unimportant" (D16:186). They emphasize the importance of nuanced analysis. Even if websites, or more broadly the Internet, do not function as a "trigger for civic engagement and participation" in any simple way, further analyses of young people and the Internet are recommended. These analysis should take into account that the Internet "interplays with young people's civic engagement, motivation and participation" in, what they find to be, "subtle and complex ways" (D16:186).

But what are young people engaged in while visiting entertainment and lifestyle sites? Anders Svensson (Svensson 2007; 2009; 2010) has studied the conversation among members on a fan site for elite ice hockey. The discussion threads are mainly about ice hockey, but the discussions *per se* are highly governed and democratically normalized by the members' reactions, as well as by the self-reflexive comments and self-corrections made by the posting authors. The crossing of normative boundaries – characterized by ethical and language violations and misrepresentation of facts – is dealt with through self-regulation (Svensson 2009:256). Overall, the online discussions are also democratic in nature and oriented toward problem-solving. Influenced by Robert Putnam, Svensson understands this informal learning as bearing a potential to build

social capital. According to Svensson (2009:264), these communicative and collective practices and the values of the online conversations can be useful in other social contexts as well. He states:

It is an illustrative example of how the vanishing social capital in the physical world as a matter of fact might be revived in the digital world. In that way we could say that social capital in part has gone digital (Svensson 2009:265).

Thus, the CivicWeb project's findings revealed that there are only a few civic websites attracting young people and that young people mostly use the Internet for entertainment and lifestyle work. Svensson's results, on the other hand, show that the discussion practices of the online fan community of HV71 could encourage social capital in line with Putnam's perspective.

Liesbet van Zoonen argues that there ought to be many sources or platforms for democratic values, "a variety of discourses is more inclusive than the prescriptions of deliberation allow" (2005:149). Popular culture, or entertainment, is one source, but should never be the only one (van Zoonen 2005:149). And, according to Judith Butler, it is even better for democratic processes when there is a "degrounding" of shared collective grounds for action, rather than a singular platform, as multiple arenas enable resistance to recuperation (Osborne and Segal 1994:38). The popular, however, is not good just because it is popular, as van Zoonen (2005:149) points out. She continues by defining "good" entertainment contexts: they "may achieve a political awareness that other means of communication rarely produce". She argues that the popular should be acknowledged as a source that: "allows for more people to perform as citizens; a resource that can make citizenship more pleasurable, more engaging, and more inclusive – in other words, a resource that can entertain the citizen" (2005:151). I am inspired by van Zoonen's emphasis on entertainment contexts, in the present case digital horses, and their potential to interplay with civil sphere values.

Cyber-ethnography

My empirical material draws on ethnographic work, the focus of which is on the technologically mediated sociality of a social domain, *The Stable*. I have paid many visits to this virtual stable. *The Stable* is a popular online commercial website, launched in 2002, and owned by an international media concern – *Egmont*. The average user age is 14 years, and in 2010, *The Stable* had around 150,000 unique users every month, spending some 30 minutes on every visit. Members can choose to use the stable for free or they can be paying members and gain access to additional functions.

The goal of my cyber-ethnography has been to learn how to behave in *The Stable*, exploring what opportunities for chatting, playing, competing and

designing this virtual world offers. I have done this in order to share similar experiences with the young participants. While cyber-ethnography cannot happen in face-to-face encounters, it is still possible to see the virtual world through the eyes of the participant (Madden 2010:178).

I have spent countless hours observing discussions, visiting stables, and counting how many visitors are using the stable. I have read short stories published on *The Stable*, studied the production of newspapers and magazines, counting discussion subjects and following threads, and conducted content analyses of ongoing discussions. The material examined in the present chapter comes foremost from the discussion forum in *The Stable*, and covers the time period May 28, 2008 to September 18, 2011.

I have my own stable, *Pal*, where I have two horses and a harvest to take care of. I have been a paying member during two different time periods, but most often I am a non-paying member. Besides carrying out cyber-ethnography, I have interviewed the two men who founded *The Stable* and who now are in charge of developing it. I have also interviewed one person who has worked close to *The Stable*, inside the same multimedia company, and finally I have interviewed professionals working in a public service company targeting the same age group as *The Stable*. Through my own stable I have introduced myself in terms of gender and age. I have never interfered in discussions or asked questions. I have not used the members' nicknames or the real name of their horses or other animals in my presentations of the material.

My interest in how and why civic potentials can be and are played out in this space – a lifestyle site for girls and young women – could of course have been pursued in many other social settings. But as Hammersley and Atkinson put it “ethnographies of digital life itself are important aspects of contemporary social research” (2007:137), because so much of the contemporary nitty-gritty of everyday life, especially among young people, is played out and worked through there.

Discussion Forums in the The Stable

The Stable allows young users to be engaged in various discussions. These discussions take place in the community's online discussion forum. In the online function called “neigh,” one can start or engage in discussions about horses, but also about other subjects. The contributions under “neigh” are distributed in three different thematic categories: 1) A general horse subject; 2) Equestrian sport and 3) *Everything but horses*. To give a sense of the interest shown in the different categories, we can take a random day – 22 August 2010 – as an example. The general horse subject had 19 different posts discussing breeding, feeding, horsemanship, horse breeds, horse trailers, caring for horses, buying a horse, riding associations, riding camps and so forth. The subject on equestrian

sport had eight contributions on topics such as long-distance riding, dressage, gallop, jumping, racing, vault and other types of riding branches. The third thematic category, *Everything but horses*, had as many as 58 different discussion threads on various topics, for example the body, popular culture and media, social relations (family, friends, partners), school-related issues, psychosocial health, dreams of the future and politics. This quantitative distribution of different discussion threads is a recurrent pattern on whatever day I visit *The Stable*. My cyber-ethnography surprised me. It became clear that what engages the online participants backstage, in the online discussion forum, is not horses but *Everything but horses*.

Methodological Reflections

Studying discussion forums has its limitations. It is difficult to know whether the person expressing a certain standpoint or alternative is being genuine. This, however, may also be a problem in face-to-face research. An informant may give information that is misleading or false, and what a person says in an interview does not necessarily translate into that person's deeds. I have no information on the number of persons using the discussion forums on a regular basis or on how many persons read the discussion threads without entering into the discussion themselves. The language in the threads may have an adult tone. In the translation to English, the language may be somewhat more adult than in the Swedish original version, at the same time as many young people express themselves in professional terms, particularly in conversations regarding psychosocial relations.

The empirical examples below have been chosen because they illustrate girls' and young women's discussions on intimate relations, institutional experiences and recent events taking place on the national political agenda.

Everything but Horses

The girls and young women using *The Stable* are, roughly speaking, on the threshold between dependent youth and independent adulthood, and the discussion threads visualize aspects of life that are of great importance to them. I can see that the girls and young women are using *The Stable* while negotiating what to expect from everyday situations as well as from life in general. Aspects of normality, courage, hierarchical relations and human-animal relations are worked through in the different discussion threads. These threads illustrate discussion practices in which the members are critical without hurting each other, thus enabling democratic integration.

I find that intimate questions concerning the body, love and sexuality are common themes backstage, in the online discussion forum *Everything but*

horses. The girls and young women's daily contact with teachers is a frequent theme in relation to their experiences of official institutions. These discussions also move into a wider sphere, including comments on political issues, such as hunting for wolves in Sweden. I will now take you on a tour of the virtual world *Everything but horses*.

Intimate Relations and Social Expectations

Boyd points out that young people's social identity "is partially defined by themselves and partially defined by others". This process of identity formation is activated when they undertake to "[decide] how they want to fit into the structures that society provides" (2008: 137). Perhaps this is why dilemmas caused by social expectations are a common theme among members of *The Stable*. When one girl, Mimmi, reflects upon whether it is normal not to have kissed someone at the age of 14, her reflection is validated at the same time as it is playfully defined as a quasi-problem. "I know what you're going through xD I'm 15 and have never been kissed, and I don't actually care. Relationships scare me and I don't want to get into that goddamn thing until I'm ready." Another member responds with laughter:

HAHAHA, shit you are TOTALLY abnormal!! xD Okay sorry, I just had to, I find it so funny. ;D Anyway, it's normal to be fourteen without having been kissed, if you see it like this, you have only lived ... around ... a fifth of your life, which means 80% of it is left. ☺ Do you think that everything has to happen the first twenty percent? It sometimes takes time but it will happen. ☺

The stable members assume responsibility for putting things in perspective, and they are supportive of different life trajectories having their own pace. According to the members, choices and events in life must not be forced to conform to invisible social expectations. Thus members support each other and acknowledge autonomous choices. In my view, one shared sacred value among members in *The Stable* is a belief in the individual and individual rights. No one should feel pressured to act in a certain way.

Courage and Alternative Strategies

The multidimensionality of life increases when actual actions are proposed and discussed. The shared cultural value of autonomous choices becomes more complex when put into practice – from mutual empathy to plural perspectives, a variety of standpoints and several solutions or alternatives are presented by members in *The Stable*. Material aspects, feelings, and responsibility for others are factors that make discussions on actions multifaceted.

The idea of moving in with a partner rather soon after the start of a new relationship is a topic that illustrates this. Ia lives 500 kilometres from her boyfriend, and she wants to move in with him (and his mother). She writes:

We've only been together for 3 months and have broken up once, so I shouldn't be thinking about moving in with him yet, but I want tooooooooooooooo!!

Moa gives Ia some social and economic things to think about before making such a decision, rounding up by proposing an alternative.

Sounds like a tricky situation! But if he lives with his mom, I would actually not advise you to move in with him and given that you've only been together for three months. And if she's single maybe the money is already tight? Maybe you could move in together when both of you have your own incomes and can take care of your own apartment?

A discussion follows in which members offer insights into their own experiences of having their loved ones miles away. At the end of the thread, Ia returns to the original question by asking: "I would really like to move [to the city where her boyfriend lives], but how do I find the courage for that?" Moa gets back into the discussion with a supportive answer:

You dare by thinking positive, and the decision to move does not have to last forever. If it doesn't work you could move back home and look at other options? Try to see things on the bright side, you will learn a lot, it will be an exciting experience to get to know a new city on your own, and then you'll have support there too – you would be moving for a reason, right?

A girl I call Marta is, on the other hand, a bit sceptical:

But just think about what you could lose if you hurry too much, things that never will return. Today, I can miss the kind of feeling I had when I had just fallen in love. You know that feeling you only get once in a relationship. Of course the feeling develops, but I think you should get to know each other for a good period of time before you move in together. I even know people who really love each other and have been together for many years, but who are unable to live together. It's something you can "practice".

In the above example, Ia is offered three different kinds of alternatives or stand-points. The first alternative is to wait until she reaches a period in life when she is in a materially autonomous position. Second, there is the alternative of following her dream, but not seeing it as a choice that she has to stay with; it could be a short-term decision. Third, we have the standpoint that she might miss something by making the choice she wants to make today. The different alternatives show that there seldom is only one solution to a dilemma in life. In this case, the alternatives range from waiting for material autonomy to dar-

ing to be dependent on others. The value put forward is that life always offers several alternatives and solutions.

Experiences of Institutionalized Hierarchical Relations

The Stable functions as a virtual room for users to discuss issues, many of which are tied to the fact that, in my view, they have low status in society and to the fact that they are dependent on a professional group – teachers – for their evaluations. These discussion threads enter into spheres of power: the young members' experiences of being in a subordinate position. Under the heading "Teachers are no saints," a discussion starts when a person shares experiences of being hurt and insulted by both her parents and her teacher. She writes:

I'm so tired of parents who believe that all teachers are perfect, that they cannot make a single mistake. I have one good teacher, I like her very much, but she's done some things that I think are wrong. When I try to explain it to my parents they make excuses for her. "She meant well, she didn't mean any harm" and "my dear girl, nobody's perfect, and everyone makes mistakes." I have also complained [to her parents] about getting bad grades from a teacher who, according to my sister (who had him as a home-room teacher), does his grading wrong. My English was poor and he said there would be a support group for those who had difficulties. Did that happen before the grades came? No. My sister explained that this teacher works that way; she also failed a grade for him, but then the year after she received the highest grade in English from another teacher. When I complain about this back home, my parents only say "You need to put in some effort." That's what I do, but he fails me anyway. [...] I have done everything, showed interest, talked a lot to him, asked for clarifications as soon as I haven't understood the English books we read, [...] because I want to learn. And what do I get? Fail. Funny. It feels like a lot of fun trying to continue to put in some effort. And then, my parents point out that it's up to ME? o, o. Has anyone else been through the same thing?

Members that join the discussion call for a school experience characterized by professionalism, justice and equality.

I had a gym teacher that I really didn't like. In gym class, we either had to learn self-defense (or whatever it's called) or play basketball. And the teams were always split into girls against boys, and he was always with the girls. If the guys scored they got 1 point, when the girls scored we got 5 points. To our advantage, certainly, but I can't stand the way he belittled us girls.

My teacher was totally f*cking annoying, and I mean it! oO For example, once in Spanish class some of my classmates had started circulating a thing

between the tables. [...] I poked it up into the middle of the table. Then the f*cking bitch says: "What are you doing?!" and I reply: "I put it there so it wouldn't be passed around anymore." Then she replied: "Stella, it's very immature to deny what's obvious." WTF?!

The professional group of teachers the girls and young women meet on a daily basis is thus critically examined. But at the end of the thread, the difficulties that a teacher might have to deal with are also an item on the agenda.

I think it's wrong that we're throwing mud at our teachers. Imagine what a bloody job they have. 20-30 children, who swear, are noisy, and so forth, every day, 5 days a week. I admire my teachers. If I were a teacher I would never have managed to deal with my own class.

In this thread, the girls and young women in *The Stable* criticize the lack of professionalism, justice and equality in their everyday lives at school. At the same time, another member of the online community reminds the posting authors that teachers also have tough everyday experiences that should be acknowledged. All positions in a hierarchical relation are associated with dilemmas that have to be worked through. There doesn't have to be one solely good side and one solely bad side of the story – instead, we are all part of the same story.

Human-animal Relations

When discussion threads focused on intimate relations and institutional experiences are left for recent political events, additional dimensions can be seen in the members' discussions. Empirical evidence is called for and the logic of the discussion as well as rules for having an opinion are brought to the fore.

A thread on hunting illustrates that what goes on in Sweden's political life also can mirror a discussion in *The Stable*. In Sweden, hunting wolves is not just a contested discussion in the discussion forum *Everything but horses*, it is also a contested political question on the national political agenda. The thread shows that arguments about values that are highly regarded among members should be well considered and presented in a more scholarly fashion compared to issues involving intimate or everyday hierarchical relations, where it is more legitimate to present arguments drawing on personal views and experiences. But in relation to animal rights, arguments need to be made in a generally more reliable way. Two factors would seem to underlie this finding: First, that if one lacks first-hand experience, it is perhaps more important to have references for one's standpoints. Second, that references and a logical discussion pattern facilitate a solid affinity between members when something important to them – human-animal relations – is at stake.

One of the most passionate discussions I have followed on *The Stable* dealt with hunting and hunters. Over a period of six days, 223 posts were made.

The discussion focused on animals' right to live: Should "nature" be allowed to balance population sizes itself, or should humans have the right to control the development of different species? Animal rights regarding wolves in the Swedish fauna became a focal point in the thread. Questions concerning how to make an argument as well as how to back up one's argument with sources are also elaborated. The thread begins with a post by Greta, who has a stand-point and an argument:

I think it's right to hunt certain animals, for example fox, moose, and so forth. Why? Because if nobody did it, diseases would increase among wild animals. For example, there's a need to remove foxes with mange because they can infect other animals. So I think it's right to "kill" wild animals and use their meat, because it's actually in this way we've survived throughout history, we are "Predators".

Greta receives an answer with a related question by Cissi. She does that with a smile, symbolizing friendliness: "I agree sort of, but one thing I don't understand is why people want to kill wolves, what do you think about that? ☺" Greta responds:

A wolf is killed when it kills sheep, and if you take out a certain number of wolves the population is reduced and it will be easier to protect farm animals and then you [hunt wolves] because of diseases, and so forth.

Cissi asks for a clarification: "So you mean that shooting wolves is okay?" Another member, Sara, approaches the argument from the point of view of the wolf.

But still, people must look after their animals better. A wolf doesn't know that farm animals belong to someone, they see them as food. Close to Yellowstone, where there are lots of wolves, people patrol on horseback to make sure there are no wolf attacks. We simply have to come up with another solution than killing animals that can't distinguish between what's mine and what's yours.

Sara continues the discussion, comparing wolf hunting with hate crime. Meanwhile, she wants to declare that it is the topic for discussion that is upsetting, not the persons participating in the discussion. She does this with a friendly smile.

It becomes more like a hunt based on hate, because the wolf hunters hate wolves. You might notice that I'm a bit aggressive in my response, but I'm not irritated with you. It's those damned wolf haters that bother me. ☺

There are implicit rules for the discussions. In the quote above, for example, Sara conveys her critical stance in an angry voice, but at the same she shows clearly, using the smiley-symbol, that her anger is not directed at other members, but at a more general societal discourse and practice.

Hanna joins in with a new argument, while dismissing the original one made by Greta, who initiated the discussion.

I think hunting is wrong. I'm very much against people who want to "play God" believing that they make a contribution by shooting animals. If we would stop hunting predators, the predators would increase, and then the number of other animals would be kept down. The statement that we were originally hunters is also incorrect.

The fact that important values are at stake might explain why it is not only the content of the contributions that is discussed, but also the logic beneath them, as well as the facts and sources supporting a certain standpoint. A girl I call Dina makes a comment, directed at Greta, about the rules of an argumentative discussion. "It doesn't have anything to do with you agreeing with me. It [rather] concerns the fact that you believe hunting is a good thing without presenting any logical reasons for this point." Dina continues further down the thread: "Majority arguments do not make your statement more valid. The fact that people agree with you doesn't make your argument truer." Another girl, Thea, also questions Greta's claims.

What is your source for claiming this? They don't shoot sick wolves. Random wolves are shot simply because some stupid bastard has decided that there should only be some 210 wolves in Sweden.

Dina agrees with the argument that claim-making requires references. She responds to Greta: "It should always be the person who asserts something who has to make a reference to her claim." The rules for discussing political issues of importance to members, where the *we* feeling is at stake, point to a need for empirical evidence to support claims and a need for logically constructed arguments.

Diversity in Unity

I have illustrated how the civic potential of *Everything but horses* is expressed as a platform for social criticism and democratic integration. The members respect each other's statements although they do not always agree. Nancy Fraser defines the public as a "plurality of perspectives among those who participate within it, thereby allowing for internal differences and antagonism" (1990:70). The continuous and engaged discussions in the *The Stable*, and the participation, creativity and diverse interventions would, in van Zoonens words, "qualify as civic competences if they were performed in the context of the political field" (2005:56). But why is this public expression of a civic culture happening in *The Stable* and what can we learn from this phenomenon?

In my view, we can learn that there is interplay between social criticism, democratic integration and entertainment. Production and reception, visual presentations and writing of texts, private and public life are simultaneously present in *The Stable*. The members can switch between different areas of interest at the blink of an eye. They can discuss current personal or political affairs or different horse topics as well as enter the market for digital horses for sale, join in on competitions while continuously working with the design and presentation of their own virtual stable. The context makes “citizenship pleasurable” (van Zoonen 2005:4). The girls and young women do not primarily visit *The Stable* to reflect on and discuss personal, social or political aspects of life, but while they are there discussion threads emerge that trigger talk about diverse opinions on other non-horse-related issues. Graham and Hajru (2011:29) show that “net-based public sphere researchers have claimed that diversity of opinions online usually occurs between forums rather than within forums”. But fragmentation does not necessarily apply to forums that are not exclusively reserved for political or civic issues. Instead, as Graham and Hajru point out: “Participants of these spaces are not there to talk politics; therefore, when political talk emerges, the chances are there for greater diversity of opinions and arguments” (2011:29). This means that, as van Zoonen also stresses, researchers must have an open mind about the spaces they are studying if they are to produce knowledge about where civic potential can be found.

The Stable offers girls and young women a social space in which they can share personal dilemmas and experiences of hierarchical relations in everyday life and in which they can initiate and join discussions on political issues. The functions in the stable, backstage under “neigh,” give opportunities for interaction in relation to many different aspects of life, while the main stage offers interaction in relation to aspects of horsemanship. The stable is a space for many interests and reflections and thus it allows many identities. It is not only a space for horsemanship, although this is the website’s core theme. *The Stable* offers functions for different tasks and multiple identities, while the horse and the stable as a community also create an emotional belonging that keeps the engagement alive. The horse in itself bears an emotional capacity that makes interaction among, what I call, *familial strangers* possible.

Research on how young people’s identity formations interplay with digital media often focuses on friend-based communities, such as MySpace and Facebook, or self-presentations on blogs and home pages (see, e.g., Boyd 2008; Stern 2008). What the context of *The Stable* offers is something different – it is a social community of familial strangers. It is a public community; you do not need a personal invitation to visit each other’s stables. In relation to *The Stable*, public means at least two things: first, that “the audience is unknown and that strangers may bear witness” (Boyd 2008:125), and, second, that the stable owners share “a common understanding of the world, a shared identity,

a claim to inclusiveness, a consensus regarding the collective interest” (Livingstone 2005:9) in – in the present case – horses. This is also why I refer to the relationship between stable owners as one between familial strangers. According to my interpretation of the concrete setting of *The Stable*, the *familial stranger* is an important concept in understanding the potential for social criticism and democratic integration. *The Stable* is a public community, but members share a common interest. While visiting *The Stable*, they are part of a collectivity that shares an interest in horses. This they agree upon. Being in a public space among familial strangers, who share your interest in horses, might create emotional bonds that facilitate entering a public space with your own voice. Members can identify with each other symbolically in order to understand the meaning of a specific argument and a certain social position, even if they do not agree and do not know each other in real life. Access to public life, interacting with persons who are both like and unlike us, is part of the process of democratic integration. In the present case, mobilization of social criticism and democratic integration goes through the horse, so to speak. Community members discuss dilemmas, on intimate as well as political levels, and alternatives are proposed. Although members share a common interest, there is no pressure among them to share the same worldview. Summing up, *The Stable* allows diversity in unity. This means that the civic potential of *The Stable* is not concerned with what to think, but how to deal with others’ opinions in a respectful manner.

The ideal of the civil sphere – where girls and young women understand each other out of principle rather than experience – is made possible through this communicative space of the digital horse. In normative developed communication some criteria must be in place: people must take each other’s arguments seriously and listen to them (Habermas 1987). This is more likely to happen in symmetrical rather than asymmetrical relations. The girls and young women visiting *The Stable* are longing for an autonomous position in society. The Internet or more specifically *The Stable* allows for such autonomy. It is not an organized activity with adult leaders; *The Stable* promotes autonomy between equals.

Perhaps *The Stable* is of particular importance to democratic integration from a feminist perspective. The history of citizenship is a male story, and when a woman takes her place in public life, it is common that she is primarily seen as a woman and secondarily as a public person with official duties, responsibilities and knowledge (van Zoonen 2005:146). *The Stable*, however – by virtue of the context of familial strangers and the anonymity of the screen – does not provide the same bodily experience as putting forward a female public voice in real life.

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IV

Producing the (Un)Civic Web

Contingencies of Online Political ‘Producers’

Discourse Theory and the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ Movement

Peter Dahlgren

In the past year, we have witnessed in many countries considerable political activity outside the formal domain of electoral politics.¹ This political engagement has taken and is taking a variety of different forms, operating in different contexts. The so-called Arab Spring began in Tunisia and Egypt, and in it, citizens of these countries managed to remove their respective dictators; in Libya a civil war emerged, leading to a new, democratically committed leadership taking power. In Syria, at the time of this writing, the regime is still killing people daily to quash a non-violent popular movement for democracy; the resulting death toll is in the thousands, with many more imprisoned and tortured. Across Europe, particularly in the south and most notably in Greece, demonstrations and riots have erupted in response to the deteriorating situation with regard to employment, salaries, social services, and higher education. Some of this has a national focus, while much of this is in direct response to austerity measures deriving from the EU. In the US, right wing activists, often with a Christian agenda, have of course been active for years, both outside and within the Republican party, while the coalescence of the Tea Party movement in 2009 has had an even more significant impact on American politics. More recently and on a thus far smaller scale, the left-oriented the Occupy Wall Street movement has spread from its New York City origins to other cities in the US and abroad.

These phenomena differ greatly in circumstances and character, but in all cases they make use of up-to-date digital multi-media, especially portable variants. Many among the activists are what we can call political producers, that is, while they are users in the traditional sense, they also specifically make use of these communication technologies to produce their own materials. These materials in turn express and in part constitute their political activism (I analyse the links between media and political involvement in more detail in Dahlgren 2009). When researchers and journalists write about these practices, they tend to speak about the activists as people with an established

political agenda, using the communication technologies as their tools in their efforts to reach their goals. And on a common sense level, such of course is often the case. However, we might introduce a more complex picture, particularly when we are dealing with the more fluid end of the political spectrum characterized by social movements, impromptu activist networks, and other less established, more alternative modes of civic participation. A basic truism that is regularly reasserted in the social sciences and at times in journalism as well, is that people act from the circumstances in which they find themselves, that is, their actions are shaped by context. Further, in some strands of literature, we can also find the argument that people themselves, in the sense of their identities, are to a greater or lesser extent, a product of their socio-cultural situation.

While the degree to which this perspective is emphasized can vary, it would seem that all analyses of social situations, not least of a political character, would benefit by at least making the thought experiment of the significance of context. To actually take the step of moving this perspective to the fore – seriously exploring the impact of context on behaviour and subjectivity – may involve a slight prismatic shift of the analytic lens, a different angle of entry into the phenomenon. However, to emphasize context will almost always enable us to illuminate things in a different way. Indeed, as we underscore the significance of contingency – to use a somewhat more rigorous concept – we come to understand that context not only shapes social phenomena in various ways, but also renders them fortuitous, unpredictable. Contingency implies that a phenomenon is characterized by neither logical necessity nor impossibility; it resides beyond predictability, it can only be affirmed *de facto*.

If we apply this line of reasoning to political producers, this means that we leave behind the usual way of thinking of them as already-formed actors with a firmly set political compass, and open up the perspective of seeing their actions (including their communication) as well as their political agendas and identities, as to some extent open-ended and responsive to circumstances that are evolving and may also contain contradictory elements. Further, this contingency derives precisely from the political milieu itself, the discursive environment in which they are operating. And the political milieu is to a great extent a media one. Thus, to analyse a political movement with a strong online presence means to follow and chart the adjustments, shifts, adaptations in its political actions and identity, as politics unfolds in the media – its own media as well as the broader media milieu of which they are a part. While the research results of such efforts may be less neat and tidy than one based on an idealized expression of the political vision of the protagonists, this “messiness” may be more in keeping with what is actually going on.

In what follows, I will be exploring this perspective of contingency with reference to the Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS) that began in New York

in September 2011. I note the first signs of the movement on the internet in June, but this analysis builds on online materials from the first six weeks of the demonstrations/occupation, beginning with its launching on 17 September and continuing until 1 November. My aim here is not to arrive at any conclusion about OWS *per se*, since it is both very much on-going and already too vast to grasp in a short presentation such as this. Rather, I want to use their media representations as well as some online news coverage and commentary to illustrate the dynamics of contingency in the context of alternative political movements. The actions and identities of political producers, especially within new movements, but the argument holds for politics more generally, are involved in a continual process of adaptation, even while we often – out of habit or at times seemingly even out of analytic necessity – “fast freeze” our definitions of them. My hope is that this approach will provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the conditions of online political producers and the kinds of practices and skills required of them. (For a recent analysis of the evolving media strategies of protest movements, see Askanius and Gustafsson 2010).

In order to pursue this goal, I will be making use of a specific intellectual trajectory, namely Discourse Theory (DT), derived from the writing of Laclau and Mouffe (2001/1985). At the core of DT is what the authors call radical contingency, which I will return to shortly. My use of DT here reflects another purpose at hand: following in the footsteps of just a very few other authors, my presentation is also geared to illustrating – albeit very briefly – the utility of this somewhat challenging tradition as a methodological approach for media and communication research. It is a rather complex philosophical enterprise, and it is not my intention to provide a full exposition; this is not necessary for the task at hand. However, for these aims, it is important to at least in capsule form sketch DT's intellectual origins and contours, clarifying how the notion of contingency, not least in regard to political identity, is one of its pillars. Also, from this short conceptual portrait, I will pull out a basic set of methodological tools. These short discussions appear in the following two sections. Thereafter I situate and summarise the short on-going OWS history thus far, identifying a few key discursive phases. From there I explore the OWS material and look at online media news coverage and commentary, in order to elucidate discursive shifts in practices and identities, as well as in the overall media milieu. The conclusions are not so much about OWS *per se* (since it is still very much an unfolding story as I write), as about the analytic implications of contingency for political producers, and the degree to which DT can be of use for such endeavours.

Discourse Theory: Framework and Method

Contingency at the Core

DT relates to a number of intellectual currents. First, the general concept of context as a framework for understanding human action has a long history in the social sciences. Not least Marx and Weber, in their respective ways, insisted on the importance of comprehending how historical circumstances impact on the action that people take. Similarly, historicism and relativism as epistemological stances have long been with us. Kant's Enlightenment arguments about how our knowledge of the world is conditioned on many factors, rendering "pure knowledge" an impossible dream, remains very much with us. In the 20th century, various strands of philosophy have explored the non-foundational character of our knowing, from the later Wittgenstein to Rorty, among others. Within sociology, and later psychology and social psychology, elements of such thinking began to coalesce into what has become a kind of orthodoxy today, namely that of social constructionism, which asserts that meaning, indeed, our sense of reality, is an on-going dialectical process between our inner "subjective" states and our experiences from an outer, "objective" world.

These themes are also carried forward in several theoretical strands dealing with language, meaning and interpretation. The hermeneutic, anti-positivist trajectory of Gadamer and Ricoeur underscore in a related manner the situatedness of interpretation: we can only make sense of things – not least communication – from the horizons of our own position. Bakhtin, the semiotics of Barthes and others, some currents in sociolinguistics, emphasise in various ways that meaning is fluid and predicated upon the "play of signifiers", that a sign's meaning is shaped by the context of other signs in which it appears. Meaning is thus never fully decided or fixed, but always to some extent "deferred", as Derrida's mode of deconstruction puts it.

Parallel to, and to no small extent inspired by these developments, and together with the emergence of psychoanalysis, gender theories, and social interactionism, fundamental questions about the nature of human beings have become perpetual themes on the Western intellectual landscape (see Elliott 2008 for an introductory overview). The concept of the subject is often used to signal this problematizing; the subject has become a contested topic, framed by a variety of debates. One axis of debate pits nature against nurture, i.e. to what extent our qualities are a product of our births versus a result of socialization. Another sets notions of a transparent, knowable self against that of a subject forever cloven to various degrees by its unconscious. Other controversies posit a unified, integrated subject against the more recent views of a dispersed subject who emerges through (deeply contradictory) social experience, mediated by language. These and other disputes criss-cross each other, with many positions arising (and fading) in the course of decades.

And finally, on the political left, Marxism could not remain immune to other streams of 20th century thought, and its history has been characterised by many revisions and internal debates. Critical challenges to the dominant paradigm included efforts to incorporate psychoanalysis (Marcuse, Reich), hegemonic meaning-making (Gramsci), the power of culture more generally (Horkheimer and Adorno), existentialism (Sartre), and semiotic versions of the unconscious (Althusser) are some of the major attempts to extend the Marxian framework to account for developments that the original model could not account for. The events of 1968 in Europe were of course a major turning point, and it was obvious that the traditional Marxist framework was in crisis. Not only was the revolutionary subject, the proletariat, not about to follow its accorded historical script, but also other radical groups and movements, with other identities and agendas contesting systematic exploitation and domination, were emerging on the political scene. Class, as the core identity for radical politics aimed at fundamental social change, had to share the stage with other critical initiatives based, for example, on gender, ethnicity, environment, and technocracy.

It was into these turbulent intellectual and political circumstances that Laclau and Mouffe's text (2001, first edition 1985) appeared. Their framework of DT can be seen as an attempt to arrive at a radical resolution to many of these issues. (The label Discourse Theory is perhaps unfortunate in that it can easily be confused with various forms of discourse analysis. Yet, as we shall see, employing DT empirically can also involve versions of discourse analysis). DT is often called post-Marxist precisely because it refuses to give class politics and identity any privileged status. Laclau and Mouffe take the view that in politics, class position is but one of any number of possible identities available. They write that the subject position of class may be contradicted by other identities; for example, a working class woman of colour may in a certain situation be faced with incompatible political options, where her feminist loyalties collide with the politics of a male-dominated working class party that also ignores the plight of minorities. On the other hand, the authors also politically promote the notion of alliances, which groups with differing political agendas should strive to connect with each other and join in common struggles.

Yet, even if DT embodies commitments to enhanced democracy, it is really not about concrete political programs; it is in fact a rather dense philosophical enterprise, and on this score has often been typified as post-structural. DT asserts what the authors call radical contingency, applying it across the board. According to Laclau and Mouffe, all our knowledge, and the discursive modalities that it takes, is completely predicated on particular circumstances; no human practice exists outside the specific conditions that both make them possible and delimit them. All human phenomena are *de facto* possible, but none is necessary; they are all contingent. Here DT synthesizes in a strong fashion many of the currents I mentioned above. The same holds true for their view

of the subject. In ways quite similar to Foucault from which it in part derives, it veers rather unrelentingly in a post-structural direction. DT emphasises not only that the subject is split and fragmented, but that it has no basic essence, arising as it does through discourses via which it positions itself. This “anti-humanism” may seem provocative, but we should keep in mind the high level of philosophical abstraction involved. There is a built-in democratic ethic in DT that aligns itself with democratic norms. Laclau and Mouffe’s view of the subject also bears close resemblance to some strands of Cultural Studies, where we find a comparable insistence on the contextual character of subjectivity, the shifting, prismatic nature of subject positions, and the ultimately political nature of the societal struggles over meaning and identities.

The basic elements of DT are thus not new, though they are rendered in a form that some critics find extreme. Other commentators, however, focus on the utility of DT, and in recent years we are beginning to see an interest from media studies to incorporate DT (see for example, Carpentier and De Cleen 2007; Uldam 2011; Askanius and Uldam 2011; Dalhberg and Phelan 2011. For applications to wider cultural analysis, see Carpentier and Spinog 2008). In their elucidation of this framework, both Smith (1999) and Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) suggest that we can fruitfully see DT as comprised of three rather distinct levels that are fused together. DT is thus firstly, a rather dense social ontology, a set of (anti-essentialist) philosophical claims about social reality and the subject.

On another level it has to do with what I would call a theory of political dynamics. This is the level that is relevant for the present discussion and is concerned with the flow and ebb of politics, via the dynamics of discourses. It focuses on the formation and contestation of meaning and identities, and offers a useful and accessible set of concepts that can be mobilized, operationalized, and applied empirically. The third level of DT is concerned with radical democracy theory and has been developed more by Mouffe in her own writings (see Mouffe 2005). While building firmly on the first two dimensions of DT, this level offers an alternative way of looking at, for example, citizenship, participation, and political discussion. Mouffe often engages critically both with the liberal and Habermasian tradition in this regard and not least underscores the importance of political alliances between different groups.

I propose to focus on the second level, the analysis of political dynamics, while also making some reference to the second level, the theory of radical democracy. As for the first level, we can suspend or at least until further notice remain agnostic towards DT’s notion of the dispersed and discursively constructed subject. We need not swallow all of it whole in order to deploy the basic framework for analysing actors and their actions (not least online producers). Actors, be they online producers or not, are always faced with social environments. DT renders these environments as shifting discursive structures

and contested sets of meanings. This has the consequence that in political contexts not only meaning but also identities are likewise never fully fixed, but perpetually “under construction”, i.e. contingent. This is not a human defect, only an instance of the human condition, which in turn allows for – demands, one might add – continual creative response.

Extracting a Simplified Toolkit

The angle on political discussion that emerges in DT can be a good starting point for deriving some practical methodological tools for analysis (here I am indebted to Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). As Dahlberg (2011) indicates, the traditional Habermasian public sphere has a number of elements that are quite congruent with DT, for example the notion of agonistic publics debating issues and trying to form opinions about them. However, the Habermasian model has often been criticized from a variety of corners: there have been calls for incorporating subaltern counter-public spheres (Fraser 1992), while many others, including Mouffe (2005) herself, have challenged the idea of rational deliberative democracy and the goal of consensus, arguing that such principles serve as constrictive and indeed even exclusionary mechanisms. Dahlberg (2011) suggests that DT, however, has one more important concept to offer, namely what is called *chains of equivalences*. In concrete situations, these have to do with coordinating the efforts of various political actors such that they come to discursively define the problems – and especially the “antagonists” – in ways that facilitate the building of coalitions and alliances, as mentioned above. These chains of equivalence involve linking together social and political demands (and visions) to generate stronger “counter-hegemonies” – even while risking a dilution of platforms of the individual groups.

We see this at work in the alternative public spheres of, for example, the World Social Forum, where a broad array of groups representing political engagement with diverse questions such as human rights, ecology, gender issues, and economic justice, strive to align themselves so that they can present a stronger, more united front against neoliberal globalization. Thus, in the on-line spaces that to a large extent constitute the sites of their alternative public spheres, these political actors try to discursively generate “chains” that link them together in common projects. Analytically focusing on such possibilities neatly exemplifies the stance that DT advocates, namely to critically reflect on what is, in order to imagine better alternatives that can constitute politically progressive steps forward.

Basically what we have here is a post-structural approach with a strong linguistic logic. Thus, meaning arises via *articulation* – the positioning of signs, words, and actions in relation to others; this is what gives them their sense. *Discourses* are structures of fixed meanings that arise as linguistic and mate-

rial practices within a particular context or setting. That discourses can have material or non-linguistic dimensions may at first sight seem confusing, but it simply means that actions and objects, as well as language, take (or rather: are attributed) meaning; they are constructed via discourses, articulated to other signs. The key, definitive signs within a discourse are called *nodal points*; these are important for fixing the meanings within the discourse. Some discourses, in relation to others, have *hegemonic* positions, that is, they offer preferred or dominant meanings. Yet, since meaning is always to some extent shifting and contested, even hegemonic discourses can never be fully secure – even if discourses and society in general are characterised by large degrees of inertia.

Further, if politics has to do with antagonisms between groups, between “us” and one or more “them”, discourses can serve as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Discourses “interpellate” subjects, addressing them and providing them with *subject positions*. As noted above, the category of the subject in some way problematizes common sense notions such as “people” or the “person”. In most contexts, the everyday usage of these familiar terms suffices, but if we want to move beyond that horizon and explore possible tensions in meaning and experience on the part of producers, the notion of the subject becomes useful. In the context of public spheres and politics, subject positions can be understood as political identities made available by pertinent discourses. However, given the often contradictory, contested and generally disorderly state of discourses circulating in society, it is often the case that subjects are to varying degrees *over-determined*, which means that they are not fully at home in any one discourse, but are pulled in different directions and position by competing discourses. Their political identities thus fragmented; the us-them divisions become less self-evident, and chains of equivalence are confronted with *chains of difference*.

DT is engaged in exploring the conditions that make specific identities, meanings, and practices possible, and how the dynamics of power support or alter them. In the spirit of classic critical theory DT offers a form of analytic practice that encourages us to look beyond the surfaces and to probe the factors that maintain particular existing arrangements – with the aim of “thinking and doing otherwise” (DT’s anchoring in the critical tradition is explored in Glynos and Howarth 2007). It invites us to imaginatively envision alternatives, and explore what conditions might be necessary for their realisation. What this short methodological sketch suggests is that we should be wary of a priori notions of the public sphere, the political and civic identities. With DT, public spheres become not just sites of political communication, but rather the spaces that discursively construct specific political subjectivities, with all their complexities and contradictions. Armed with such perspectives, it becomes possible to study the discursive/media environment of specific groups of citizens, examining what subject positions are offered. One can incorporate analyses

of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors, elucidating what can promote political engagement generally, but also more specifically the political positions that are pertinent for the specific groups. DT's general scepticism towards established conceptual categories, its emphasis on contingencies and its alertness towards manifestations of antagonism can serve us well in thinking about not only why things are the way they are, but also how they might be instead, and what might engender the changes.

A recent example of the use of DT for critical media research is found in Uldam (2010). She examines the online campaigns of two London-based movements that are part of the larger Global Justice Movement that challenges neoliberal globalization. Uldam looks at the leaders' rationale for using these online spaces (Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, as well as web-sites), their online campaigns, and the members' identification with the campaigns. Deploying the key concepts adopted from DT, she examines political identities as strategic discursive constructs in these media practices, contingent upon a variety of factors, including organizational ones. What is suggestive about this work is the operationalization of DT categories and their application to extensive empirical materials as well as for the analysis.

Let us now turn to the Occupy Wall Street movement, and try to elucidate it via the toolkit of DT.

Occupy Wall Street: Produsers and Politics

The First Six Weeks

The original idea for the protest actions is usually credited to *Adbusters*, a Canadian-based activist magazine critical of consumerism and its consequences, especially in regard to the environment. During the summer of 2011, on their website (<http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupywallstreet.html>) they launched the idea of a demonstration on Wall Street as a way of protesting corporate influence in politics. The idea quickly snowballed through the alternative media, and the slogan "We are the 99 percent" began to take hold. This slogan points to the gaps in wealth between the richest and most powerful sector of the population, and the vast majority, a gap that has been growing rapidly since the late 1970's. Very soon after this initiative, with various groups getting involved, the demands of what needs to be changed began to cluster around corporate greed and the corrupting effect it has on government, and the impact of lobbyists, along with economic inequality more generally.

The demonstrations began on September 17, 2011, with the protesters occupying Zuccotti Park, near Wall Street (they were not permitted on Wall Street itself). Tents and other facilities were set up; a few hundred protesters are there, in shifts, more or less permanently, while their ranks swell to many thousands

as particular demonstrations are organized. The occupation continues today, six weeks later at the time of this writing, even as the weather is getting colder; the autumn and winter weather will no doubt be a serious challenge in the weeks ahead. The movement is characterized by fluidity and heterogeneity; there are no designated leaders, and no concrete set of demands that it stands united behind (themes I will return to below).

After first trying to ignore the movement for almost a week, the mainstream media began to pick it up, and news coverage, blogs, alternative media and social media were spreading the messages of the movement, analysing, supporting, and criticizing them on a global scale. Media coverage took an upward turn early on, not least with mass arrests and the circulation of amateur footage showing unwarranted police violence using pepper spray, which generated a political scandal and sympathy for the demonstrators. Support for the protests grew, some unions aligned themselves with the demonstrators, a large number of liberal celebrities expressed their support, and by Oct. 9 the movement was spreading to hundreds of communities and cities in the US as well as abroad; a global "Occupy" movement was taking form. There emerged not surprisingly a massive flow of communication within the movement and between it and the outside world. It soon became a very dense and complex discursive milieu. For example, on YouTube, after six weeks (the end of October) a search yielded approx. 70,000 results, including contributions from the OWS movement itself, as well as groups and individuals across a vast global political spectrum: from the Defeat Obama Campaign to RT America, a Russian English-language 24/7 television news service that promotes the movement and sees it as symptom of America's decline. Al-Jazeera has given it considerable and favourable coverage, both in news reporting and by its regular bloggers.

The profile of the participants the first week was largely young, white, and middle class, but as time went on it became considerably more mixed. A survey conducted with about 1600 visitors to the OWS website (Captain 2011) found that a third of them were 35 or older and one fifth was 45 or older. One half was employed full time, while 20 % worked part-time and just over 13 % were unemployed. About 15 % could be considered affluent (earning between \$50,000 and 80,000 per year, and another 15 % quite wealthy, bring in over \$80,000 per year. A big majority – 70 % – see themselves as politically independent, with just over 27 % identifying themselves as Democrats and about two and half percent as Republicans. Two-thirds of the respondents were men; it was not clear if this is representative of the movement; the number of non-whites was small, but impressions from media coverage suggest that this category has been growing.

Some more detailed information on the views of the protesters emerged in a smaller survey (see Paybarah 2011), done on site with about 200 respondents on Oct. 10 and 11. It found that a big majority had supported Obama during

the election, but now about half no longer did so. Also, 65 % assert that government has a responsibility to provide affordable health care, a college education, and a secure retirement. They want to see higher taxes for the rich. On the question of what frustrates them the most, 30 % answered "The influence of corporate/moneyed/special interests". Only six % said "Income inequality" and three percent said, "Our democratic/capitalist system." To the question "What would you like to see the Occupy Wall Street movement achieve?", 35 % answered "Influence the Democratic Party the way the Tea Party has influenced the GOP" and 11 % said, "Break the two-party duopoly." Only four % responded with "Radical redistribution of wealth".

Between the two surveys it is not clear how many actually support the Democratic Party, but overall there is a strong impression of a movement that is broad, even if not fully representative of the 99 %.

Also, the results suggest that it is largely left-reformist and populist rather than radical or revolutionary. But in keeping with the contingency perspective, we should remember that a survey at best captures something of people's political subjectivity at a particular moment under specific circumstances, and that it is not carved in stone. These data can provide us an interesting starting point, but they should not be reified.

The producers' self-representations: Subject positions

A mix of prevalent discourses, with their varying positions, fissures and contestation circulate in the media, constituting the relatively stable hegemonic discursive milieu in the mainstream media. From the perspective of DT, the occupation of the park near Wall Street, the demonstrations, and other on-site activities of the movement enter into and confront this milieu; this in turn is picked up and given varying forms of representation in the media. In looking at the OWS phenomenon I have made use of a variety of online transnational mainstream media resources: BBC, CNN and, as a sort of counterpoint to these two sites, Al-Jazeera, which offers a 24/7 global news service with a journalistic that at times varies from the two Western sites (Barkho 2010). Also, *The Huffington Post* site was used, especially for its commentary as well as a few other sites of various political colours. For the movement itself, I have restricted myself to the main New York OWS website <http://occupywallst.org/>. (There is also a more specific New York City General Assembly of OWS <http://www.nycga.net/>, which is a detailed record of the discussions and decision-making processes of the movement). The website was actually established well ahead of the occupation, on June 14, and is used here as the main evidence of the producer side of the movement, even if most of the production takes the form of text messages, i.e., the website does not have much in the way of multi-media interventions, which can be found on other sites, such as YouTube.

In the horizons of DT, the major contingencies for the movement are the definitive characteristics of the American society, its (historically anchored) overall socio-political attributes, as well as the key elements that define the contemporary crisis; these contingencies as are embodied in the discursive milieu. The movement inserts itself into this discursive context. On the main OWS website we find an interesting presentation and evolution of political identity. It was clear from the beginning that the movement was very heterogeneous, with a broad array of viewpoints gathered under its umbrella; after all, given the rhetoric of 99 percent of the population, it must encompass quite a spectrum of political identities. A virtue was made of this heterogeneity, while at the same time there emerged some effort to give it some definite shape.

On July 26 we can read a statement that sets the tone for the months to come:

As the two U.S. political parties unite to dismantle Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security, it's clear: The bankers are looting decades-old peoples' programs and the Democrats can't help us. Obama can't help us. Elected officials can't help us. It's time for the people to meet and take the bull by the horns! [...] The current depression-level crisis is not due to lack of revenue. It's due to theft. The trillions that the banks are sitting on right now? That's our money. Whether through taxes; the looting of pension and social security contributions; or the wealth we created from our labor -- all of that belongs to us. Come to Wall Street August 2 and strategize -- on how to get that back!

The theme of accountability is underscored on Sept. 7: '#OCCUPYWALLSTREET is all about breaking up that cosy relationship between money and politics and bringing the perpetrators of the financial crash of 2008 to justice'. And the reiteration of the "We are the 99 percent" becomes a cemented slogan.

Thus, among the key nodal points in the discourse of OWS are: the people, 99 percent and one percent, democracy, and corporate greed. From the outset, OWS presents itself as an all-inclusive movement with no barriers: it is a large and sprawling "us" mobilized against the one percent "them", consisting of the economic and political elites. The movement offers a view of itself as horizontal, open, transparent collectivity, united in its victimization by the one percent. An ethos of sharing and empowerment is established on the very first day, where it defines itself as an open source project, making available all its internal deliberation for others to use and build upon. A supplementary element was soon articulated to this set of nodal points: given the ban of loud-speakers in the park, the demonstrators make a democratic virtue of necessity by developing the "open mic" method of verbal relay. What a speaker says to the crowd, without any amplification, becomes repeated, in successive waves. This is a cumbersome process, but a practice that is inclusive and participatory.

The movement itself presents a leaderless collectivity (though there are a few key spokespeople, notably Keith Olbermann), based on a number of working

groups and a general assembly, with no hierarchy. This is modified in early November with the introduction of a "spoke council" at Liberty Square (Nov. 3), which aims to make more effective internal coordination of the movement. Yet the aura of direct, participatory democracy remains a core element of the movement's identity.

Concern and consideration for people living near the park is expressed; meetings are held to discuss the noise (especially in regard to drumming), with the neighbourhood (Oct. 13). On Aug. 9 the website offers a link to a practical "quick guide on group dynamics in people's assemblies" – a sort of instruction kit for how-to-do direct democracy. The reference to "the people", however, often invoked, is somewhat of a "floating signifier" one, as DT would call it: it is not fully anchored (and is traditionally one mobilized by political actors to point to their support base).

The signifier "the people" has articulation with strong American traditions (e.g., Carl Sandberg's poem *Yes, the People*), yet can also galvanise with socialist traditions – something seen as very un-American in the mainstream US society. Thus, when The People's General Assembly is introduced on 4 August, the signification become cloven. A reference (Aug. 20) to President Franklin. D. Roosevelt's speech on an economic bill of rights is framed with reference to early socialist thought and the French Socialist party, indicating not only a perspective far to the left of almost all Americans, but also an intellectual identity presumably not shared by the majority within the 99 percent.

The dominant political tone on the website is what might be called "strongly reformist". But many voices are contributing, and we also see phrases such as "We call for workers to not only strike, but seize their workplaces collectively" (Sept. 17, the day the occupation begins), and "...we are foremost here to oppose the growing power of the ruling class" (Sept. 30). Such terminology evokes images of socialist revolution, suggesting problematic internal fissures. While the daily flow of messages underscores the inclusiveness of almost Americans – and soon this is expanded to global contexts – we also see the celebratory presence of left intellectual stars such as Slavoj Žižek and Cornell West, and the textual support of others, like Noam Chomsky. These are figures that are either unknown or seen with suspicion by many mainstream Americans. There is also a strong theoretical profile in the critiques of consumer culture, materialist values and so (especially on Sept. 12) – evoking the issue intellectuals as a defining subject position of the OWS movement. Also, this generates a parallel discourse to the one concerned mainly about economic justice and democracy: themes clustering around values and culture are now also discursive elements of the movement.

DT puts much emphasis on building alliances. There are OWS allies – potential and actual – that are named, as well as ignored; we could say there are some problematic juggling between the chains of equivalence and the chains

of difference. Some Democrats in Congress express their support, but little is made of this on the website; OWS defines both of the political parties as part of the problem. Much of what OWS has to say is perfectly in harmony with the discourses of the World Social Forum and its alter-globalisation stance; yet it is not mentioned, probably because of WSF has not had much public visibility in recent years and is not associated with any concrete successes. However, exchanges of solidarity with the demonstrators in Greece and activists in Cairo are made public on the website, as well as of course Occupy efforts going on in other American cities. At the end of the six weeks, the website refers to the large Israeli demonstrations, citing them as evidence of anti-neoliberal politics; no mention is made of the plight of the Palestinians.

Potential articulations of all kinds, hovering in the background, are part of the overall contingencies of a political movement. Those deriving from popular culture have a particular kinetic energy because they are so ubiquitous and circulate quite freely. Thus, popular culture often offers easily applied articulation of meaning that can at times be enabling (e.g., the undermining of hegemonic discourses via television comics), but also problematic. Many commentators linked OWS with the film *Network* (popular among journalists), from 1974, which featured the frustrated TV anchor opening the window of apartment and shouting "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore". In the film this sets off a mass wave of people following his example. The problem with this articulation, aside from the possible frivolity of popular culture association, is that the depicted movement had no political impact. It was easily absorbed by "the system". While this particular articulation was visible for a while, it never really became definitive.

Thus, the subject position of the OWS has certain problems of ambiguity. It is multi-vocal, with a variety of valences, but is not heavily over-determined, i.e. not profoundly torn by competing internal positions; it largely works. Given the genuine heterogeneity of the movement, OWS manages nonetheless to offer a reasonably coherent political identity of the morally enraged, economically victimized, and politically disenfranchised majority. While a few voices give evidence of replacing capitalism (with what is not clear) the dominant vector is, as mentioned, reformist. It is a populist left movement; comparisons with the Tea Party movement became inevitable, but even if there is some analytic foundation for some overlap (based on shared distrust for the power elites, for example), there is little confusion about their political trajectories. The specific demands that OWS put forward, however, are not so clear; it is difficult to make a powerful political slogan of "less corporate greed". This lack of clear political proposals has been one of the main themes in the media coverage of the movement

Political Response: A Shifting Discursive Milieu

As mentioned, the mainstream media coverage was at first slow to take off, and as it began to focus on OWS, it was initially wary. Yet, public opinion surveys showed quite strong support, especially among New Yorkers: one university poll found that 67 percent of the voters of the city approved of the movement, while only 23 percent disapproved (Quinnipiac University 2011). A poll by *CBS News/NY Times* (2011) showed that 43 percent of Americans agree with OWS, while 27 % disagree. The brutality of the police in a few incidents in the first days of the coverage no doubt helped the movement win sympathy, many of the positive commentators – especially found on Al-Jazeera blogs – underscored that the basic message of the movement was clear and had no difficulty resonating with large numbers of Americans.

In fact, a number of mainstream commentators could accept the lack of organization and structure, as well as the absence of coherent political demands. They understood that OWS is not a traditional protest movement that struggles for specific political goals against a targeted enemy. Rather, as some commentators suggest, the protest is less about victory than about inclusion, participation, and consensus. Benjamin Barber (2011), a theorist of democracy, writes:

To understand what's going on, look at what OWS is, not what it does. Start by taking seriously the ubiquitous signs asking "What does democracy look like?" and answering "WE are what democracy looks like!" Look at the process, which is a bold attempt to embody a "horizontal" paradigm of participatory engagement as an alternative to "vertical" big league moneyball democracy... The protesters' principles are in their processes, which stand in radical contrast to how we normally conduct business...

Support has come in from many intellectual figures, and a good number of unions, as well as a few major business leaders, most notably George Soros (*The Huffington Post* 2011). This in turn triggered a response from the Right, with some commentators (for example Newman 2011), claiming that Soros was funding this "anti-capitalist" movement. Soros denied this claim, but it is interesting to note the semiotic dissonance that emerges when "Soros" becomes articulated with "anti-capitalist". As noted above, a few Democrats in Congress expressed support (not least House Democratic leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi), and President Obama said he could sympathise with "the frustrations that many Americans feel". From the Republican side, among the presidential candidates, came, not surprisingly, negative responses, e.g. Herman Cain and Newt Gingrich. Interestingly, the front-runner, Mitt Romney, showed a subject position that was over-determined, i.e. self-contradictory: on a YouTube clip (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJ_orudj6hA) he characterized the OWS protesters as "dangerous" and that they are "inciting class warfare", yet soon after he is quoted as saying: "I look at what's happening on Wall Street and my view is,

boy, I understand how those people feel” (Geiger and Reston 2011). Further out on the right wing, commentators such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh confirmed their reputations for rabid analyses, with the latter referring to OWS as “this parade of human debris” (Limbaugh 2011).

Such responses are not startling – though the extent of public support may have come as a positive surprise to many within the movement. The expressions of reaction in a way embody the basic political contingencies of political realities in the US: there are clearly well-entrenched discursive hegemonies that support and justify the prevailing arrangements and thus condemn OWS, yet it is a hegemony that has cracks in it. Romney’s remarks give clear evidence of the cleavages: a defensive reflex for the system, together with a capacity to empathise with those who are so dissatisfied with it. For OWS, seen as a collective of online producers, to navigate its way through such complex and contradictory landscape as they have managed to do in the first weeks of their movement must be seen as a significant political accomplishment. They have not only succeeded in maintaining a fairly consistent political identity on the website (which may in fact gloss over backstage differences, but that is a different issue), but also, via their discursive nodal points, they have established chains of equivalence with allies within the Occupy movement across the US as well as abroad. They have gained considerable public support, drawing a number of important elite politicians and other public figures, as well as some unions, to their side. Perhaps most significantly, they have managed to make visible and accentuate the cracks in the dominant discourses and open up public debate in the US in an unprecedented manner, at a time of crisis when such a transformation is sorely needed.

Instead of Conclusions

OWS has contested key features in the hegemonic discourses of late capitalism, offering many people critical subject positions that previously were not possible within the realm of legitimate politics. Moreover, despite its internal heterogeneity, it has in fact also made available on a broad scale an alternative conception of politics as such – one that offers not just a vision of a more equitable society but also one that demonstrates through its own practices and discourses a vision of what democracy should be. Yet, despite the fissures it has located and widened, the pull of the hegemonic should not be underestimated. History will determine the fate of OWS, as well as the issues that it addresses. At present the various manifestations of the global crises (the plural form seems more apt) in the political economic system, in the US, Europe, and on all continents, is intensifying; critical response on all possible fronts is needed. Within media and communication research, the methodology of DT,

with its emphasis on contingency, discourses, hegemony, subject positions, nodal points and chains of equivalence may hopefully prove useful in mapping discursive patterns and envisioning alternatives. It should not be seen as a competitor to other approaches, but rather a useful complement. Citizens generally, and produsers specially, need all the good tools that are available.

Note

1. A few short sections of this text first appeared, in different form, in: Dahlgren, P. (2011) 'Mobilizing discourse theory for critical media politics: Obstacles and potentials', in Dahlberg, L. and Phelan, S. (eds.) *Discourse Theory and Critical Media Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

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Creating the Civic Web

Exploring the Perspectives of Web Producers in Europe and Turkey

Shakuntala Banaji & David Buckingham

For several decades now, there has been anxiety about the decline of young people's participation in formal politics and traditional civic organisations in Europe. In recent years, this has led to the oft-expressed hope that the internet might help to re-engage young people. The motivation for young people to participate, it has been suggested, might spring from their familiarity with using new technologies in their everyday lives, and would thus require only the most minimal changes in the communicative style of governments, political parties or other social and civic actors. In an attempt to evaluate the most alluring and motivating formats for engaging young people, previous research on civic and political websites – whether belonging to governments, campaigning networks or activist organisations – has largely tended to focus on their form and content and, less frequently, on their users. Very little attention has been paid to the organisations or individuals who produce such sites, or to the contexts in which they are actually created. Case studies of civic sites (e.g. Olsson 2008; Vromen 2008) and larger-scale surveys (e.g. Coleman 2008; Montgomery et al. 2004) may make use of interviews with producers, but in general the *labour* that is entailed in the production of such sites has remained largely invisible. There is a striking contrast here with the growing body of research on the nature of work in other areas of the media and creative industries (e.g. Deuze 2010; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2010).

In an attempt to redress this imbalance, this chapter takes a detailed look at the production of civic websites for young people in Hungary, Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey and the UK, drawing on data from a large Framework 6 EC-funded research project. We consider the rationales for the creation of the sites, issues of funding, editorial control, working practices, organisational structures and conditions of labour. While the sites in our study are addressed to young people, production often involves multi-generational teams, with their own hierarchies that are at least partly based on age. The larger the organisation, the more likely it is that the labour will be divided into

different functions – for example, writing content, design, technical maintenance and moderation – and in some instances these functions may be outsourced to independent providers. These issues clearly vary across different types of sites and organisations, although our primary focus here is on the charity and NGO sectors, and to a lesser extent on activist and political organisations.

Methods: Research Design, Sample and Interviews

Our wider research project involved several distinct but overlapping forms of investigation (see Banaji & Buckingham 2010; Banaji & Buckingham 2013). Following a review of existing studies, we began by mapping the field through the selection and classification of approximately fifty civic/political websites and thirty youth-specific sites in each of the countries mentioned above, making a total of 560 sites. We then went on to develop some 50 in-depth case studies of civic websites, examining interconnections between pedagogy, design, mode of address, ideological stance and the aims of the site in the context of specific national historical and social circumstances. In considering the users or potential users of these sites, we undertook a broad-ranging online survey with over 3000 participants alongside more than 70 in-depth qualitative focus groups.

Our analysis in this chapter, however, focuses on the producers of such sites, and derives from 85 in-depth interviews we conducted with producers of civic websites in each partner country. We attempted to sample producers from a range of organizations and contexts, from national and local governmental bodies and large NGOs through to ‘grassroots’ youth activists. Our sample was inevitably somewhat *ad hoc*, but we intended to reflect a cross-section of civic or political concerns, as well as different types of organisations and sites. These sites include those focusing on local and national politics, as well as areas such as voting, social activism, volunteering, global campaigning, youth advocacy and counselling, gender, sexual, religious, ethnic and national identity issues, and so on.

The producers of these sites – primarily designers, moderators, content editors and/or “webmasters” but also, sometimes, organisation directors or co-ordinators – were interviewed face-to-face or over the telephone between February 2007 and May 2008. An open-ended qualitative interview schedule was used. In each country 12-14 such interviews were conducted covering a range of logistical issues, including:

- the funding model on which the site is based, and the prospects for survival in a more competitive (and commercialised) online environment
- the governance of the site, for example in terms of editorial control and moderation, the extent and nature of young people’s direct involvement, and the way they perceive and deal with “malignant” users

- the marketing or publicising of the site – how potential users are made aware of its existence and encouraged to use it, how links between sites are decided, maintained and encouraged
- the broader combination of “old” and “new” media in the strategy of the producing organisation, and the purposes to which these different media are put.

The interviews also covered some broader philosophical issues that are directly related to the broader themes of the project, including:

- How producers conceptualise their audience (the users of the site). What constructions and definitions of “youth” are entailed here (not least in terms of gender, ethnicity etc.)? How are youth addressed, and what assumptions are made about their interests, motivations and relationships with the medium?
- How producers conceptualise the medium. What do they see as the specific potentialities or affordances of the web? For example, to what extent do they see it as a means of organising existing activities, publicising or proselytising to attract new adherents, or building communication among those who are as yet uninvolved?
- How do producers (and the organisations they represent) conceptualise civic participation? What skills, knowledge and investments do they perceive as necessary for civic participation? How do they believe young people best acquire such skills? What kinds of activities do they invite their users to participate in, both on- and off-line?

In the following sections, we offer a summary of some key points emerging from these interviews, along with some illustrative quotations relating to particular sites.

Organisational Ethos and Funding Models

At first sight, the organisations active in the online civic sphere might seem almost as diverse as the websites themselves. Some sites we explored in our research had large offline organisations behind them, while others existed mainly online. Some were created and maintained by paid staff, while others relied on individual members or volunteers to keep going. However, closer scrutiny revealed two distinct models at opposite ends of a spectrum – one formal and sometimes highly corporate, particularly in the case of youth branches of major political parties, large charities, global campaigns and mainstream religious organisations; and the other following an informal, sometimes *ad hoc* “alternative” model, as in the case of smaller NGOs and activist groups.

Some of the latter were slowly moving towards a more formalised structure, with a clear division of labour; although many sites combined elements of both models, or lay somewhere in between. In light of this diverse set of aims and contexts, producers were keen to suggest that researchers should not be judging these sites by a single uniform standard of what makes a “good” civic site for youth. Rather, we should be looking more holistically at the purpose of the organisation, its team, its ethos and the role the website plays therein. This section therefore aims to give a sense both of the many pressures faced by website producers in this sphere, and of the trade-offs between form and content that might occur behind the scenes.

A high proportion of the day-to-day work on the sites in our sample is undertaken by part-time or voluntary staff or by staff who also have many additional duties in the wider organisation. The commitment and motivation of many of these staff is what sustains the sites, but the sites are often only one element competing for their time and attention. The on-going struggle for funding creates a very insecure working environment, which can in turn lead to a disconnection between the organisation’s aims and the actual practices on the site. Many sites are not updated for months because initial grants only funded the building of the site and not its updating and maintenance, which are crucial to success. There is a fairly high turnover of volunteer staff in the case of many of the sites surveyed and sometimes this leads to the closure of a site entirely.

In some respects, the situation here mirrors that within the media industries more broadly, where financial and political pressures have led to a widespread “casualization” of the labour force. In this context, employment is often very unpredictable and insecure, and mostly takes the form of short-term contracts; there are few opportunities for training; working hours may be long and conditions poor, and extensive hours of unpaid overtime may be expected (Deuze 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). Access to jobs in these industries is becoming increasingly difficult, and many of them are dominated by middle-class graduates (see Bateman 2011; McLeod et al. 2009; Paterson 2010).

Similar points apply to the growing world of “internships”, not least in the NGO and charity sectors. In the UK and the US, it has increasingly become a necessity, not least for university graduates, to undertake unpaid work in their chosen field in the hope of obtaining more permanent employment – although this option is one that largely depends upon the possibility of parental support, and is therefore more readily available to those from more wealthy families (Perlin 2011). In this context, employment appears to be becoming a “buyer’s market”, and there are numerous instances of unscrupulous companies taking advantage of the situation in order to ensure a continuing supply of free labour. Yet these practices are sustained by the possibility that such exploitative (and self-exploitative) conditions might eventually lead to “cool jobs” – and indeed

more socially worthwhile jobs – in a more egalitarian, non-corporate working environment (Ross 2003). (For further discussion, see Banaji and Buckingham, forthcoming, Chapter 3.)

Given the increased availability of social networking and “Web 2.0” tools and the competitive, time-consuming nature of fund-raising, it is not surprising that several civic organisations with little funding end up using free blog-style software and relying on voluntary labour. For instance, *Judapest*, a community blog on Jewish culture and identity based in Budapest, Hungary, has never achieved any funding; it is designed, run and funded by a small group of young people, runs on a free blog-engine and is hosted on a reader’s server for free. At the other end of the spectrum, some organisations are skilful in raising funding from the corporate sector, with limited and easy-to-fulfil agreements on both sides. For example, also in Hungary, *I-dea (Demokratikus Ifjusagert Alapitvany – Foundation for Democratic Youth)* is a public benefit not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to create opportunities for youth to develop democratic values and skills through experiential learning, which is funded by the mobile phone company Nokia. Meanwhile, *Planet*, an NGO running programmes to help young people going abroad as voluntary workers and professionals, received a donation from the Hungarian subsidiary of the multinational telecommunication giant, T-Com. Both the latter organisations were satisfied with the cooperation and did not feel overly constrained in their activities by their funders. However, such partnerships with private companies are not always viewed with such comfort in other countries: organisations in the UK in particular commented on the complexity of inviting private corporate investment, and the compromises that might result.

On the other hand, commercial activities, particularly merchandising, can provide a growing form of income for some civic sites. This is especially apparent with large campaign and charity sites such as *Amnesty International* and *Unicef*, which market a range of “ethical” products that may in turn help to promote their cause (as in the case of t-shirt slogans (Banaji and Buckingham 2009)). However, it can also be important for much smaller operations, with different political motivations: for example, much of the funding for the nationalist *tu-je.si* website in Slovenia comes from “patriotic” merchandise ranging from apparel to coffee mugs and refrigerator magnets, most of it featuring the nationalistic Carinthian panther symbol.

Both funding models and institutional requirements often constrain website content or its presentation, and this has to be balanced in everyday practice against what individual website producers think or want to do:

F, Your Amsterdam, Netherlands: Basically, I can do whatever I want, although [my employer] has some norms, for example, they want the information on the website formulated as *neutrally* as possible.

TL, *Youth Parliament*, UK: We have to be very careful about child protection issues and also about allowing certain kinds of language.

In most of the organisations we surveyed, the issue of funding is also crucial to the type of experience provided for young people on their websites. It has implications, for example, in terms of whether content is updated regularly, whether anyone responds to emails, comments and questions, and how quickly post-moderated contributions go online. An inadequate supply of funding also makes for a very insecure working environment, with almost equal amounts of time being spent on the work of the site and on looking for funding to continue the site in the future. The issue of funding is also linked to the demographics of the organisational teams and to the sense of belonging experienced therein:

M, *Young Socialists*, Netherlands: We have a new board and co-workers each year, and that makes it very difficult to have a website policy. For example, each new board demands an entirely new website. And they are responsible for the website, and don't allow me to make a website policy. That is how our organisation works. (...) Also, the design of our present website is made by people who don't work with us anymore. That's the problem with volunteers. They work on the website when they happen to be available. That can be bothersome.

As this suggests, changes to a site's management and to the volunteers in an organisation can make continuity and maintaining a "brand image" a difficult proposition. Funding is inevitably key to the survival of websites and the organisations that run them. It determines a range of aspects, from the establishment and composition of production teams, the design and technical features of the sites, through to the ideological and political stances that producers feel they can be seen to take in the public domain. Independence is a significant issue for many civic and political organisations aiming to reach young people or run by young people; but it may have to be compromised or sacrificed in the interests of survival. While the following section examines the implications of this context for a site's overall reach amongst young people, we return squarely to the issue of funding towards the end of the chapter in our discussion of the sites' and producers' ideological frameworks and ability to intervene in formal politics.

Marketing and Promotion

Most civic website producers have neither the time nor the money to publicise their sites adequately among those who are not already engaged. Hence the core of users remains relatively small. How to get young people to "google you" even if you believe that they have the skills is a key question for some

site producers. For most organisations in this sphere, publicity and becoming known is a key issue. We encountered a number of strategies for doing this from word of mouth recommendations to attempts to be listed higher than other similar organisations in search engine rankings. However, in many cases in our sample marketing and publicity is not given as much thought and/or financial input as it needs. This is partly due to the idea that the internet in itself is an excellent means of becoming known nationally and internationally, but also because most small civic organisations do not have a dedicated budget for promotion.

The producers we interviewed also indicated a number of best practices in this area. Some sites seek publicity offline in as many older media as they can afford. If finances are tight, they rely on word of mouth, Facebook links, a multiplicity of broadly sympathetic mutual links with other organisations, face-to-face presentation of the site to large groups, and big or topical events to bring users to the site. Turkish producers in this sample were particularly aware of the importance of these best practices, and have also been challenged by the banning of You Tube and various other websites in the country.

Conceptions of Young People as an Audience

Definitions of young people amongst civic producers varied broadly along a spectrum. At one end were producers who may or may not be young themselves, but accepted some of the current discourse about young people as the “disconnected generation” in relation to politics and the civic sphere. For example, one producer who was himself from an older generation spoke as follows:

L, *Lebet Más a Világ/Another World is Possible*, Hungary: ... young people today seem to be terrified of commitments. Of getting involved, standing behind something firmly, something that could determine your future, it freaks them out.

On the other hand, in some cases we found young producers (under the age of 25) who thought that they could communicate easily and naturally with young people simply by virtue of being young themselves. These producers put little thought into variations amongst young people based on social class, ethnic origin or citizenship status, assuming a broad cohesion in the concerns and communicative style of all youth. However, while some producers saw youth as fun-loving, entertainment-orientated, internet-savvy and enthusiastic, other refused such generalisations, arguing that youth were internally differentiated and non-homogenous.

There was, additionally, a general sense in several interviews even with older producers of youth civic sites that contemporary youth are misrepresented or

misunderstood by older generations. For example, the producer from *Judapest* in Hungary talked about the way in which pre-democracy era adults, such as one older man with whom he has had to debate the politics of the website during a meeting, think about young people:

B, *Judapest*, Hungary: [They think] we are the hot-headed young doing stupid things, and what's worse, he started giving me this paternalist, authoritarian bullshit, when he doesn't even know me, he has seen me, and yes, I am young, but not that young, so that he could talk to me this way. [...] They are not like me, not really democrats and they are not interested in this whole thing.

Another producer in the UK echoed this, but provided a more optimistic view that was shared by many civic producers, particularly in the Netherlands:

MB, *B-Involved*, UK: It's embarrassing, the low level of respect [young people] expect from adults in the community. So if you actually treat them with a level of respect I find them no more difficult to engage or have serious political or social conversations than any other group – actually I find them easier because [...] they're enthusiastic, they're unused to people taking their views and opinions seriously, they're used to people challenging their views and opinions, they are used to being told they are *wrong*...

In some cases, as in the Hungarian example, national histories partially account for some of the orientations towards young people, while in others it appeared that more general commonsense views were being challenged.

The rhetoric of “youth empowerment” and “youth voice” was also evident in a number of the interviews with producers across the sample, particularly in the UK, Turkey and Spain. These discourses see young people as needing to “find a voice” and to be given the skills to make this voice heard. Some producers within more activist and/or charitable organisations felt that there needed to be more opportunities for young people to receive the training and develop the skills necessary for making their concerns heard in the public sphere. Ironically, however, some of them were aware that their users tended to be mostly those youth who are already engaged or skilled in forms of civic participation offline.

While several producers seemed keen to shed the “one size fits all” view of young people, this could conflict with the assumptions of their funders who may have particular conceptions of their target audience – although equally these may vary depending on political commitments, age differences and preferred pedagogic styles. Some producers, notably those with extensive experience of working with youth offline, were keen to stress that young people are not generic but specific and exist in real local communities. They do not necessarily experience politics and civic action as utterly alien and hence do not always need a “sweetener” (parties, cinema, entertainment) to ease its passage.

However, most older adults and young people do not view either political or apolitical civic work as something that is a *replacement* for leisure activities, or an alternative to them; and hence competing with websites that offer such leisure activities by trying to add a veneer of fun or to disguise politics as a game might prove ineffective.

These discussions led to considerable debate among producers about whether websites should be attempting to “speak” to young people in “their” language, using slangy expressions and informal language, cheerful iconography, bright colours, text message speak, and so on. Some producers suggested that this was the *only way* to speak to youth, while others argued that this was a complicated and potentially patronising enterprise.

The Internet as a Medium

A sizable number of producers we interviewed spoke of the internet as a “youth tool”. The internet was variously described in interviews as “a brilliant first point of contact”, a “multimedia medium”, now possessing “much of the power of traditional broadcast media” and a “bottom-up medium”. These views were reiterated by many of the producers, who insisted that the internet was an “inherently democratic” medium. One producer in the Netherlands contrasted the internet’s potential with the closed and biased agendas of the mainstream media:

M, Maroc, Netherlands: The media have a way of publishing: [they are] not critical in copying each other’s news. And before you know, a whole new reality is created which is, in fact, fictitious and which makes our target group feel treated with contempt.

However, evidence from across the sample in all the countries also suggests that neither of these assumptions – about the internet being inherently democratic or a youth tool – is wholly true in relation to civic participation. There are also more complicated positions taken up in relation to it. The representative of the Union of Catholic Scouts in Slovenia, for instance, suggested that civic organisations should use the internet and be up-to-date with such technologies and communication opportunities in order to “bring young people back” to offline civic action from “where they have gone” online.

The internet was also mostly regarded as an inexpensive method of disseminating information and making contact with young people. However, some producers pointed out that for a site to be known there needs to be quite a lot of thought and funding given to marketing and publicity, and that the type and quality of internet access is very variable for young people and for organisations, with hidden costs that are not often considered.

Many websites and organisations in this sector also have to appeal to stakeholders, funders and educators, a large number of whom fall outside the 15-25 age range. Indeed, in some cases, part of the *raison d'être* of the organisation is to communicate a specific set of ideas and values *about* young people to older adults and establishment institutions. This makes the language chosen on the site and the manner of communication all the more complicated, and changes the amount of control that young people outside the organisation might have over the ways in which the organisation presents itself online: if funding depends on government and government bodies are wary of certain kinds of language or politics, then the site might well have to censor or control young people's contributions in order to achieve continued funding.

Interactivity and Safety Online

According to most producers in our sample, forums and interactive applications have to be carefully encouraged, motivated and managed. This takes time and money for personnel or a high degree of voluntary motivation, which may not be readily available. However, getting civic or political discussion going artificially online where there is no organic or bottom-up interest in an issue or cause was seen to be particularly difficult, regardless of the amount of money and effort put in:

F, *Your Amsterdam*, Netherlands: Nobody used our forum. I therefore decided to add some of my own fictitious content on the forum, to see whether people would respond to that. But that also did not happen. I tried several times, but people are not interested apparently. And it was spammed all the time. [...] I know that there are forums that are used very intensively, but ours is not; perhaps because we have a very general target group.

A content editor from Spain introduced the notion of "quality control", suggesting that it is not just important but vital to moderate content:

I, *Jove Cat*, Spain: Like many other institutional sites [our site] goes *from* the Administration *to* young people. But we've also taken the challenge of encouraging participation [...] What we're *not* going to do is to open a Messenger or a YouTube in our site because we believe that government money is not for that [...] We're going to open this section next year [where] we will encourage participation of young people that have something to say about... global warming, housing, sports, etc. [...] However, we need to ...think of some type of quality control, to decide what type of experiences we will publish. This can't be like a blog where you publish and I comment. We need a quality control of what is published here.

In the Netherlands and the UK most notably, we studied several online civic organisations formed by young first- and second-generation immigrants to challenge prejudice both within and outside their communities. Some of these sites are subjected to fierce and racist critique and flaming, sometimes by organised rightwing groups. In such instances, and perhaps more generally, the internet is not necessarily a safe place for all young people to engage in civic debate. In Hungary, Roma sites attempt to avoid this situation by having closed membership or by censoring posts from racist users. We also heard from other producers who had been threatened personally or institutionally because of the content of their sites, most notably those run by and for young feminists, gays and lesbians. Safety and protection from harm is thus more evidently a concern for producers of sites which appeal to children, ethnic minorities, sexual minority groups and religious groups.

More generally protection against spam and flaming are often at the forefront of content moderators' concerns, although there is typically little financial aid in this endeavour. Several producers described how they had moved from post-moderated to pre-moderated content, sometimes as a result of such difficult experiences. This was the case, for example, with the UK government-funded citizenship education site *HeadsUp*:

BG, *HeadsUp*, UK: It's quite funny because the pilot stage which was obviously four years ago or so – I kind of watched with interest the pilot stage which actually had post-moderation of comments. There was this huge schools online thing – who we obviously had recruited, so once they realised that their comments were post-moderated, they sort of bent the rules slightly and maybe even broke the rules, and basically wrote any kind of content they liked. So we had to pretty much – from then on read all the comments first... But it was a very good learning curve. So from there we had to say okay, this has to be pre-moderated. But now, with this pre-moderation in place for about I think for the last four years or so, it's been very successful.

Both in the case of generalised flaming leading to post-moderation and in the case of deliberate political, racial or sexual abuse online, leading to closed, subscription-only communities or the closure of forums, many producers found such “self-censorship” or “censorship” problematic because it conflicts with the democratic rhetoric surrounding the internet. It can and does generate continuing moral and political dilemmas; yet to many it comes to be seen as a practical necessity or a survival mechanism. The goal of B, the blogger of judapest is to create a space with very clear boundaries which inculcate rational and informed debate and discourage flaming, anti-semitism and “pointless” time-wasting arguments. It is, according to him, a sphere...

B, *Judapest, Hungary*: ...where educated and knowledgeable people can have inspiring discussions about certain issues. [...] To do that, we have our principles of moderation that we published on the website. This is a moderated forum. We have about 30 authors posting regularly. We don't want to make it too democratic, the blog format itself is not a really democratic genre, not like a forum, which is an utterly democratic medium and therefore it levells off discussions. Here on the other hand, we have opinion leaders who compose focussed, structured, well-written posts. Fortunately, we have a community here, and the quality of the comments is usually extremely high. We have to protect this environment. So there are a few things we delete immediately: vulgarities, defamation, offtopic comments etc., in addition to that we don't let anti-Semites set the agenda – we don't believe in that dialogue. We think it's a completely fruitless debate: it sucks your energy and that's all. It mobilises people that is clear enough, it is obvious that people like circus, but I don't want to provide that circus. So we don't give floor to anti-Semites. [...] I just ban these users. [...] Besides that, I like to erase retards [sic] as well. This is not a primitive blog and it is a community as well where we share certain premises. If someone comes here and does not share these premises, it threatens the level of discussion. Wasting your time arguing with anonymous strangers, that doesn't make any sense. [...] And most of the internet culture is exactly about this, arguing with noname people. [...] Very serious people going crazy over arguing with 15 year old kids. And it has a zero impact factor, it's like flushing an expensive drink down the toilet. [...] One can waste a lot of time doing this and it is utterly useless. On the other hand, what does make sense in my opinion is to create a forum where intelligent, knowledgeable people that share some interest can discuss things challenging and stimulating each other. You have to protect that atmosphere.

This account suggests the many complex realities of “doing the civic” online. B has strong opinions about the types of interactions that should be allowed in civic spaces online and those that should not; and these are implicitly tied both to his policies as a site producer and to his politics more generally – his aversion to debate with anti-semites must be set in the context of Hungary's history of anti-semitism, and particularly the events of 1944 and 1945; while his assumption that 15 year olds are not worthy of serious engagement can be seen as a far more individual opinion but also arising out of group assumptions and rhetorics. All this suggests that the considerable power of those who control the spaces for debate – with their own ideological and pedagogic proclivities – must be balanced against some of the known problems in internet debate: the potential pointlessness of engaging strangers in political debate; the tendency for “trolls” (whom B calls “retards”) to dominate the spaces through their offensive and annoying comments; and the hurt and stress of being racially or

ethnically abused online. Pre-moderation and strict policies to which all members have to adhere are a way of avoiding such eventualities. Pre-moderation, of course, also represents a significant expense and time commitment; and for organisations that are concerned to maintain a consistent profile or sense of “mission”, encouraging open debate may create more difficulty than it is worth.

Online and Offline

Many producers across all the national samples were of the opinion that face-to-face contact trumps internet contact as a means of getting young people to have sustained participation in civic and political activities. However, for one-off mobilisations where vast numbers are needed, the internet and mobile phones were seen as invaluable tools. Problematically, only a small minority of online producers were aware of and anxious about the problem of marginalised young people becoming further marginalised because they are neither explicitly targeted nor reached by internet-based civic organisations. Generally there seemed to be little awareness amongst producers that they are reaching only a fraction of youth, mostly from amongst the most highly literate and most politically or socially motivated. This pattern varied a little across the national samples, with the UK and Spanish producers showing more awareness and desire to change this situation, and the Slovenian producers the least; but in general, organisational strategies to reach marginalised and unconnected young people were few and far between.

Similarly, the way the organisation uses the internet is what makes it appealing to young people or democratic. It can be made more accessible and more democratic or less so. For instance, the *AKP* youth site producer from Turkey maintains that comments by users would not be appropriate on a political party website, albeit one for youth. In a different instance, the forums of the website of the far right group *Screwdriver – Blood and Honour* are unsurprisingly full of anti-democratic and racist remarks and rhetoric but also of claims to civicness. The use of the medium and the message depend partly on the ideology, aims and ethos of the organisation and partly on the ways in which users choose to interpret and act on these.

The Civic and Political Sphere

There was, additionally, a wide spectrum of ideological standpoints and political views in our sample, from left-wing, anti-capitalist and socialist through liberal and social democratic to rightwing and far-right producers. Many producers of all ages felt that young people do not have a problem engaging with politics

and the civic sphere; on the contrary, it is traditional political organisations that have disconnected from them. Producers suggested that some civic websites for young people are tapping into newer forms of civic and political participation such as “ethical consumption”. However, they indicated that it was generally young people who are also already interested in traditional offline issues of social justice and new social movements who also engage with these “new” forms of action online.

In discussing how to define and talk about political and civic participation with young people, one producer summed up their approach:

MB, B-Involved, UK: We *never* talk about it as politics. The way we’ve talked about it is: “What kind of world do you want to live in and how do you want to get it?”

Crucially, with regard to hopes that young people will be reconnected to politics and civic participation in the online world, several producers argued that young people’s interaction with the public sphere seems to be most successful when it is *both* peer-to-peer and enables opportunities for reciprocal engagement with those in power. Most youth civic organisations tend to offer *one or the other*, and the engagement with politicians is most often not reciprocal, in the sense that there is little two-way dialogue. Some producers see this as a limitation of the online sphere and suggest that offline, though there is not nearly enough “vertical interaction”, there is more genuine dialogue and collaboration.

Wishing to remain “non-aligned” with the adult or governmental audience is one of the reasons given by some producers for favouring a simpler website even if this means no funding with “strings attached”. This returns us once again to the stark connection between funding models and ideological or organisational aims. While some producers – of all ages – appear very clearly committed to engaging young people with particular kinds of politics and with giving them opportunities for particular kinds of civic participation, they have accepted that their websites’ funding models mean they cannot give young people themselves complete or even primary control of the ideas on the website or of the organisation. Indeed, they fear that this could potentially jeopardise their funding by damaging the public image of the organisation. Yet other producers in this sphere, who work on websites for larger funded civic organisations, claim that while addressing young people and appearing to represent their concerns, the parent organisations, generally made up of older adults, maintain tight control of their public image. This is a very political trade-off and must be seen as such. One producer, with many years of experience working in the world of youth civic engagement, who wished to remain anonymous, summed it up in the following way:

The thing that always interests me most in any project is *what is the agenda of the person who pays the bill?* My point is that when government or grant-funders fund youth engagement projects it's like a parent organising a birthday party for the child. The various possible approaches are likely to be variations of: (1) the parent organises a party that they themselves would enjoy (2) the parent organises a party that they believe the child will enjoy (3) the parent and the child organise the party together according to the child's wishes (4) the parent gives the child some money and lets them organise the party in whatever way they want...The commonly held belief in youth participation circles is that option (4) is by far the best, because the young people have the power. My contention is that while there might be other benefits coming out of the experience of organising the party, the child has no more real power under option 4 than in option 1 because ultimately all the spending power remains with the parent and can be withdrawn at any time and 100 % of the accountability for what happens remains with the parent under all circumstances. The agendas of the people with the power and achievement of projects are often positive, but there is a misguided, much promoted, notion that government agencies or groups actually *give* power to young people when in fact what they are mostly doing is *keeping power and using young people to help them exercise it*.

In light of this, claims to “represent” young people, to be “bottom-up” and to be “grass-roots youth networks” either on- or offline, and in local, national or EU contexts, need to be understood as part of a specific rhetoric. As such, these claims need to be interrogated to ascertain whether and how young people do actually participate in the organisation, what they gain from this participation and what they expect the outcomes to be.

Conclusions: Decentering Technology

For most producers in our sample, as for the young people in our focus groups (see Banaji and Buckingham 2010), the most important forms of civic motivation and serious political action are usually found offline. The internet is seen to serve various potential functions here: it might provide a spark that provokes people to action; it might serve as a conduit or a tool or a space for storing information and for communication; it might be primarily a promotional gimmick enabling ideas and issues to circulate, and campaigns and movements to organise and debate. In all these respects, the online and the offline are connected and complementary in various ways. The online world exists within, and as part of, the offline world. This has two key implications: first, we should not be drawing such large or binary distinctions between the

two; and second, we should not be searching for some form of “pure” online civic participation that begins and ends online.

Equally crucially, the assumption that the internet is always a cheap, safe and equal space where all can participate has been challenged time and again during our research. While the internet is an excellent tool at the disposal of those already interested in politics, it is much less effective in reaching out to and engaging those who are not already engaged. This is partly because of the nature of the medium, but also because those who are less likely to be engaged are also those who are less likely to enjoy good access to it – and while that is changing, internet provision is still largely governed by the logic of the market, which is primarily to target those who are already well served (Warschauer 2004; Fairlie 2006).

Likewise, most civic sites are addressed to those who are already engaged – as is apparent in their implicit assumptions about what they know, what they are likely to be interested in, and what is likely to motivate them. Casual visitors – perhaps also less well-educated, less middle-class visitors – are far less likely to be addressed or drawn in. In terms of rhetoric on the websites in question, this becomes self-confirming – a matter of preaching to the converted. Thus, problematically, it might be the case that the internet can actually *reinforce* particular forms of exclusion – that it might become a forum where young people are invited to participate, but only if they follow rules set by those already in power, and only if they behave according to certain middle-class norms of responsibility and good manners (Banaji 2011). And this is an invitation that some young people may well decide to refuse.

Since we conducted our research, there has been much hype about the shift from a static web 1.0 internet to a dynamic age of social networking or 2.0. While the “cost” and the institutional politics of running civic or political campaigns online, or encouraging people to engage with causes or parties or particular ideological standpoints, does not disappear just because organisations choose to use already built commercial platforms to publicise their work, the roles of producers become more complex. Writing about the use of the web by anti-war activist groups, Kevin Gillan argues that “the creation and dissemination of meaning through Internet technologies has been included among the core practical tasks of movement organizations” (2009: 26). Yet these “core practical tasks” constitute a body of labour: the work must be carried out by someone, or by a diffuse group of people, who all become *de facto* “producers” via their role in building, maintaining or contributing to a website. We are well aware that social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter as well as websites encouraging community moderation are increasingly utilised by civic and political actors to kickstart, maintain or widen their campaigns; but these same strategies are also used by commercial actors to draw civic users towards particular forms of consumption or behaviour, thus complicating the

definition of civic “producers” still further. However, many of the questions about ideology and pedagogy, ethos and access, control, authority, skills and remuneration that we raise in our chapter are equally applicable to this “new” set of tools. The opportunity, time, skills and confidence to post civic content, the positioning of ideologues and writers in groups or networks, the communication of group ideals and demands, the connections between online and offline actions and the sustained, democratic participation of young people from different sections of society remain issues with as much significance in an age of social media as they did in an age of print.

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Adopting Social Media in the Corporate Sphere

The Tricky Route to Monetization of Facebook Fan Pages

Anders Svensson

Media and communication research on the Internet, and later “social media”, has largely centred on the role of the digital public sphere in political communication and its deliberative and civic potential. When the Habermasian private sphere was the focus, its corporate function was often seen as a colonizer of human life worlds, and as the cause of commercialization of the public sphere. The corporate sphere is commonly perceived as a rather homogenous and threatening force and the power and ability of its actors to commercialize social media is more or less taken for granted.

The object of this chapter is to highlight the corporate sphere as a heterogeneous space, where there are significant knowledge differences regarding how new technologies can contribute to the accumulation of capital, and to further critically discuss possible obstacles entrepreneurs need to overcome in their attempts to colonize social media for commercial purposes. The focus is on the question of the power of interpreting the possibilities to monetize the social networking platform, Facebook, and ultimately its contribution to the commodification of loyal consumers.

Perceptions of Social Media in the Corporate Sphere

Conceptions of the social web’s positive impact on business are today widespread in the corporate sphere. The faith is particularly strong that social media is important for new and successful marketing. On the question, “What is the most important trend in marketing today?” two hundred Swedish brand managers put social media in first place (Internetworld 2010). It is interesting that the belief in social media has grown so strong, considering the collapse of the New Economy in recent memory. It seems logical to assume that entrepreneurs may expect that social media intended at least some of the changes that the New Economy never meant. Curran notes that one of the

changes that the New Economy never brought about was to create a level playing field between small and large enterprises, and “the New Economy thesis failed to take adequate account of the continuing economic advantage of corporate size,” (Curran 2012:7). The social media thesis is based, as we will see, on explicit assumptions that social media, in particular, has an upside of positive impact on businesses. Implicitly, it is assumed this may be valid for any size business. This could mean that social media, unlike the New Economy, might have the potential to create a level playing field between small and large enterprises.

Positive perceptions of social media’s potential are constantly reinforced by mass media representations of the phenomenon as a success story. Examples of this are recurring reports on worldwide ever-increasing numbers of users and the use of rhetorical figures such as Facebook or Twitter Revolutions. The perceptions as such have, on various paths, their origin in the kind of literature that José van Dijck and David Nieborg (2009) have analysed in terms of manifestoes, designed to convince the reader that a fundamental paradigm shift is upon us. In a spirit of liberation and change, it is proclaimed how the new way of thinking will affect how people go about their everyday lives. The social web is said to have created a new species of collaborative customers, something Tapscott and Williams (2006) readily state to be “the lifeblood of the business”. The new conditions require new business models and companies have no choice: “Harness the new collaboration or perish” as Tapscott and Williams (2006:13) phrase it. A similar demanding manifesto discourse can also be found in articles in business and marketing journals like *Journal of Macromarketing* (e.g. Kozinets et al. 2008; Arvidsson 2008) and *Business Horizon* (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Kietzmann et al. 2011).

Knowledge Divide and Power of Interpretation

Whether media representations involve the push factor or threat, there are unlikely to be many actors in the corporate sphere who know nothing about social media’s potential. Many are probably convinced *that* they should involve them in their business. The questions they ask are most likely about *how* this should happen. One of the problems that the new network platforms carry with them, according to van Dijck (2012), is that the technology requires an increased knowledge: “Whereas most users before could still engage with technologies they understood, the technicity of platforms, their business models and regulatory schemes have become so complicated and invisible that their consequences may be beyond the comprehension of even well-educated, technically oriented minds” (2012:172). Entrepreneurs are most likely to be no exception. Their main task, which they have knowledge of and time for,

is usually to manage the manufacture of their products or the performance of their services. Had they both an interest in, and time for, computers and were familiar with advertising and marketing, many would most likely still lack satisfactory knowledge of how best to use social media in their business.

In other words, there is a great need for knowledge about social media in the corporate sphere. This has also been discovered by entrepreneurs who imagine a pristine market for a hands-on genre, management literature, which in a compatible manner intends to disseminate knowledge about social media and marketing. The genre is characterized by catchy titles, a layout of easy-to-read-listings, step-by-step models, and a marketing discourse mostly recognizing opportunities. Book publishing has been intense in recent years. A search on “social media + marketing” at Google Books (www.google.com) occurs in a plethora of editions. Some of them turn to the entrepreneur who does not know anything at all about social media, e.g. Zimmerman and Sahlin’s (2010) dummy for the novice and Abernethy’s (2010) guide for the absolute idiot; others are intended for the more interested, e.g. Parker’s (2010) 301 and Hoenig and Lytle’s (2010) 550 tips; some turn to the poor entrepreneur, e.g. Cockrum’s (2011) low and no-cost 101 ways to grow the business; while others are intended for the busy ones, e.g. Treadway and Smith’s (2010) one-hour lesson on social media and Facebook and Gunelius’ (2010) thirty-minute course on step-by-step techniques in the field.

The above mentioned titles reveal that there is a competition for audience segmentation within the corporate sphere. The intention most likely is to make money in the outskirts of what could be regarded as a digital knowledge divide. Like all social divides, this one also holds a power relation between those lacking knowledge and those possessing it. The latter has, furthermore, great power of interpretation in terms of whether and how social media should be engaged and what they can accomplish or not for corporate aims. Their expertise is not limited to how social media works and how they can be activated in business operations. A selling point is the claim to be able to establish how companies can monetize their application of social media. One example is Lena Carlsson (2009), who secured early her part of the Swedish lack-of-knowledge market with the publication *Marketing and Communication in Social Media: fruitful dialogues, stronger brand, more sales*. Carlsson’s title builds a three-step model that takes companies to success: (1) a fruitful dialogue with the customers in social media, (2) “causes” a stronger brand, (3) which in turn leads to increased sales. In the world of management literature it is not only possible to monetize social media and exploit them for corporate purposes; it is also described as if it were a simple matter.

The Monetizing Process

Research has a somewhat different view of this. It is not the social media *per se* that is to be monetized, but the particular values that social media brings. These values do not have their origin in the corporate realm and are not of direct economic value, but are social and cultural values which particularly belong in the public sphere (van Dijck 2012). Examples of such values are peer production and cooperation (Tapscott & Williams 2006), community values (Bruns 2008), making contacts and sharing creative expressions (Bates 2008). All three authors are prominent in the early branch of research that emphasizes social media's potential to fundamentally change the conditions for business and communication. They have developed concepts such as "wikinomics", "producers" and "social economics" in order to describe how the social and cultural values of social media can change existing production models and power relations between companies and consumers. They have also attempted to demonstrate how the socio-cultural values, in general terms, have capacity to be monetized by companies. Tapscott and Williams (2006) argue that this can be done by turning active online communities into loyal customer bases. Bruns (2008) means that active encouragement and facilitation of clients' creativity may monetize community values. Bates (2008) claims that taking advantage of customers' contacts and relationships are the way to monetize these specific values. However much the authors want to be specific about how the monetization will be accomplished, they do not come any closer than this. They point out the potential of technology, e.g. housing active online communities to be turned into loyal customer bases, but not how the user can concretely harness this potential.

The most fully implemented monetization of social media has been carried out by the companies behind the media platforms themselves, like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. In the case of Facebook, van Dijck (2012) shows how the company long and well built its "cool" side, as she calls it, completely free from commercial elements. The cool thing, however, incubates three potential economic values: attention, popularity and connectivity, whose combined values form the basis of Facebook's business model. "Coolness is a reputation carefully nourished by platform owners," van Dijck states, "a site needs many visitors, attractive content, and a high level of connective activity before it can monetize either one of these values" (2012:171). Coolness, materialized in the concepts of *attention*, *popularity* and *connectivity* ought to serve as an analytical model to determine if and when companies can begin to think in terms of monetization of their Facebook platform, or to analyse claims made in the management discourse what companies can achieve by using Facebook. It can hardly be too farfetched to say that those who want to succeed by monetizing Facebook in their business should follow Facebook's own example. The seemingly simple,

to create attention, popularity and connectivity among users, thus requires time and creative power, not primarily sales technique. The latter could rather damage the creation of the “cool” thing. Clemons (2009) has paid attention to the complex problems of monetizing virtual social networks, and stresses that people may leave platforms when they feel exploited or manipulated. Since social network sites are meeting places, everything that is reminiscent of a market place is a problematic feature, even if the platform owner and producer is a business company. Monetization of corporate social media is thus much more complicated than management discourse states. Already the very first step towards the “cool” thing is a big challenge, i.e. to even attract attention.

Fanboosting as the Starting Point of Facebook Fan Page Monetization

For a Facebook Fan page to be successful in attracting attention, and further popularity and connectivity, it must quickly reach people who start liking the page and thus become the first contingent of fans. This is so crucial for a Fan page’s attention potential and popularity that it has created yet another special niche in the corporate realm, known as Fanboosting. The largest organization for this type of service is U.S. *Fanboost.net*, selling fans in packages. From just under \$60 up to less than \$3,500 the company offers 500 up to 50,000 guaranteed and targeted fans. *Fanboost.net* possesses a “massive global fan base” which they use to “manually send out invitations to each and every one of them while also making suggestions to people who share your (company’s) same interest.” It is, in other words, a striking example of what van Dijck (2012) terms “engineering connectivity.” From their website we also get to know that there are other similar services for fanboosting, some of which claimed to be less serious and even sell “fake fans run by bots” (*fanboost.net*).

Fanboosting also exists in Europe. Hosting the central server in Norway *Fanbooster.no* has offshoots in most parts of Northern and Central Europe, Scandinavia, the Baltics, and Russia (*fanbooster.no*).

Swedish entrepreneurs have encountered *Fanboost.se*, at least via entrepreneurship organizations *Startaeget.se* and *Driftig.nu* on whose websites *Fanboost.se* in January 2011 was marketing its services. *Startaeget.se* has more than 80,000 members and is aimed at providing information, advice and assistance to start-up companies and individuals that are about to start their own business (*startaeget.se*). The number of members for *Driftig.nu* is unknown but the organization has about 3,000 fans liking their Facebook page and is aimed especially at women entrepreneurs (*driftig.nu*). The two organizations bring together just that kind of entrepreneur who is most likely to initiate an effective marketing and who is in most need to learn how to do it with help of social media.

It is no coincidence that *Fanboost.se* uses these organizations' websites to advertise their services, which aims to motivate entrepreneurs to open up Facebook Fan pages. In doing so, they might need help with attracting attention, making it popular, and engaging prospective customers. This is exactly what *Fanboost.se* has knowledge of, especially how Facebook Fan pages get attention, and here is a market of entrepreneurs who might be interested in getting access to this knowledge. Many perceive them probably as an authority in the field as well. Through its knowledge advantage *Fanboost.se* also has the interpretative power and desire to ultimately monetize its position of power.

Therefore it is appropriate to look further into what is being claimed about social media in general and Facebook Fan pages in particular, to potential clients via *Startaaget.se* and *Driftig.nu*. But this is not the only motive. The claims *Fanboost.se* peddle can be seen as general statements about Facebook's benefits that might be found in almost any publication in management discourse on social media. The following critical analysis may be regarded not only as an analysis of Fanboost's claims in relation to Swedish entrepreneurs, but as a general example of claims made in management discourse.

The Case

The central issue in Fanboost's message is about motivating entrepreneurs to market themselves using Facebook. After a general introduction to the world-wide social network, the consultancy promises five positive effects which lead to getting people to "like" and become fans of your company's Facebook fan page. They continue:

Once they "liked" you they will see all your upcoming status updates, which in turn lead to:

- The relationship between your company and those who "like" you being strengthened
- Being able to show how many people like you, which strengthens your credibility with new visitors
- Your status updates appearing throughout a fan's network of friends thus increasing your chances of creating new fans/new customers
- You having the opportunity to serve your fans with an offer that particular day when they are ripe for a purchase

Just like here, the first claim in Fanboost's layout was represented in bold and the four following as punctuated subparagraphs in an otherwise continuous text. In this way, they differentiate themselves visually and get added value in terms of attention. If someone happened to not read all of Fanboost's text, there are chances they read at least these points. These are also the claims that are

most important in Fanboost's message and serve to really convince the reader about the positive impact the rather simple act of pressing the like-button can mean. The question thus arises to what extent these five claims can withstand critical reading, i.e. be achieved in the manner and to the extent claimed.

As support for the critical reading, knowledge based on research and experience of producer and user behaviour in social media and technical information about Facebook, is gathered from three people who work professionally with social media as administrators and consultants. Two of them have a background in media and communication studies. They are referred to as "professionals" in the presentation and analysis of results.

Claim 1: Conditions for the Fans to See Status Updates

Fanboost.se states on entrepreneurial sites *Startaaget.se* and *Driftig.nu* that anyone who clicks the like-button on a company's Facebook Fan page will see all of its regular status updates. This is not entirely correct. At least two crucial conditions must be met: timing of publication and regular interaction from users.

Concerning the condition of timing, it means that the sender (the company) and the recipients (the fans) must be logged in to Facebook simultaneously. The average user is logged in twice a day (skandnet.se). Observations of companies' Facebook traffic show that the times it occurs is when people start work, morning coffee, lunch, afternoon coffee, after work, and late at night. A company thus has two chances during the day to be simultaneously logged in with the average user, and thus be immediately visible in his flow. The question is at which two of a day's six most frequent Facebook visiting occasions this will occur. To be absolutely sure to reach directly into any fan's flow, the company would likely update their status six times a day. Such frequency occurs when a Facebook Fan page works as Customer Service, where a fairly regular communication and interaction takes place in one day. More common is a frequency of one or two updates a day, but most small businesses do not have time for more than one or two updates a week.

If the average user logs in to Facebook twice a day, it means that some fans log in more often, and are easier to synchronize with, while others log in less frequently, and are therefore much more difficult to time. Consequently, most of a company's fans are quite likely logged in at different moments from when the status updates are posted. None of these thus see any updates from the company directly on top of the feed on their respective Facebook pages. Updates that have arrived during the time they were logged off are found further down in the feed. What they reach then, if they scroll back through the feed, are out of date messages, older the farther down they scroll, and

therefore of little use to like or comment. People are aware of this; it could be said to be a characteristic of Facebook communication as a genre. Usually people do not scroll very far down in the feed, status updates on Facebook are thus better perceived as fresh products with a critical best-before date. A previously posted update becomes old in the same moment the sender posts a new one.

However, it is not enough to meet the conditions of timing to be sure that the fans will see all the status updates. It also depends on the interaction from the users, i.e. to like and comment on the company's updates regularly. Facebook uses an algorithm that calculates what will be displayed in the user's log, depending on how often he or she has interacted with a page. If someone becomes a friend of a company Fan page, i.e. like a company, and then do nothing more with the page for a foreseeable future – do not like, do not comment, and do not share – then the updates from that company will disappear from that user's feed.

To be accurate, *Fanboost.se* should have formulated the description of the first of the five advantages differently: the fans will see all of a company's regular status updates, if they are logged in to Facebook at the same moment, and if the updates are engaging enough to make the users like, comment and share the updates. If not, either they risk ending up at the tail end of updates from the circle of people's friends and thus become outdated or they risk to completely disappear from the fans' feeds.

The probability of the first scenario to occur is very significant because Facebook is per definition a social network platform rather than a commercial one. People have more friends than companies they like. The average Facebook user has 229 friends and 15 % of all users update their status daily (pewinternet.org). If we stick to these statistics, at least 34 updates from friends arrive daily in the average user's feed. If the updates from the companies they like, usually just a few, are not posted with full timing, they risk disappearing quickly into the fans' feeds.

The probability of the second scenario to occur is even more significant because a regular updating with an engaging content which encourages fans to interact with the page, requires not only timing but also time and workable ideas. Professionals' experience is that most companies who enthusiastically start to use Facebook tend to lose momentum after a month and most give up within three months. They also underline that this development is more common the smaller the company. The more people who strategically and systematically work with social media in a business, the better the chances that the Facebook page can evolve and survive. Many employees in the communications department and a well-organized Facebook strategy mean that the company has a chance to reach the fans with good timing and to maintain their interaction so that Facebook's algorithm continues to direct updates to their feeds.

Claim 2: Conditions for the Relation to be Strengthened

The second advantage with a Facebook fan page is said to be that the relationship between a company and those who “like” it, will be strengthened. Moreover, according to how the claim is formulated, the same holds true for all fans.

Research on fans has demonstrated that the group usually is structured by the level of commitment. The simplest categorization goes from the most dedicated to the more marginal followers (e.g. Armstrong 1999). However, these have quite different lines of approach for clicking the like-button: the hard core fans do it because they are dedicated to a company’s brand and products, the marginal fans do it because other people did. The prospects for strengthening the relationship with these two groups are thus quite different. With the first category, there are already links, with the second, the company has to start strengthening weak links. In neither of the cases can a company expect the act of pressing the like-button to automatically start strengthening ties. The main tool is to provide fans with opportunities to comment and speak up. The optimum is if they experience participation. The decisive factor is not that it is an effective participation or real influence but rather a sense of participation or influence. Olsson and Svensson (2012) have demonstrated how companies can create and reinforce this sense by their communication.

If the sense of participation can be created and experienced as strong, as described, it can most likely also be perceived as weak or non-existent. Clemons (2009) has demonstrated how important it is for users to stay on, and that virtual network platforms are perceived as meeting places and not market places. Companies need to understand that a Facebook Fan page is a space for dialog rather than a megaphone and sales channel. This in turn requires not only production of regular updates that enthruse fans to interaction, but also time, energy, and ability to respond to comments and questions. If not, users will cease liking and commenting, even if the company’s updates are promoting interaction. The social media relation between companies or organizations and users is complex. Svensson, Vimarlund and Gäre (2011) have demonstrated that, despite the fact that an organization provides opportunities for participation on Facebook, many of the users show weak willingness to participate or even waive from being fans.

Promoting dialog and interaction, and thus providing a meeting place, is crucial for strengthening relations with the users. What kind of content then provides the most interaction? Professionals’ experience, taken together with their observations of the numbers of likes and comments on corporate sites they work with, indicates that interaction is highest when companies put the rational content and professional tone aside. Most interaction occurs when they give insights into the company and the employees’ daily lives at the office, particularly when written in a conversational tone. The same pattern could be

observed at UMO's Facebook Fan page (Svensson, Vimarlund and Gäre 2011). This highlights even more clearly that Facebook communication is perceived by its users as a social genre, which is problematic for persuasive and selling communication.

Claim 3: Conditions for the Number of Fans to Increase Credibility

A third advantage of getting people to like a company's Fan page, according to *Fanboost.se*, is that the company's credibility with new visitors strengthens when it can see the number of people who like the company. This claim is based on the assumption that there is a correlation between quantity and quality, i.e. numbers of fans and the concept of credibility. This can be seen as an expression of a concept mixture that van Dijck (2012) describes regarding the notion of popularity. This is equated to values like truth, trust, objectivity, or quality, even though it has no relation to these values. That many people like a company cannot by definition be tantamount to the company being credible. Rather, it is an indication that the company is popular. This, in turn, might depend on various factors, for example, good and cheap products or services, quick delivery, great activities on its website, and even credibility.

The link between many fans and credibility is also possible to understand in a media-specific way. A Fan page with many fans involves people, has interesting updates, and stimulates interaction. This is characteristic of what can be regarded Facebook credibility. Facebook Fan pages with a small number of fans are credible provided that the company is fairly new on Facebook or that it is highly specialized and therefore cannot have so many fans. If neither is the case, most users perceive this as a business with a Fan page with low or no Facebook credibility at all.

Claim 4: Conditions for Achieving Viral Effects

The fourth claim that each time fans like a company's status updates, this will be displayed for everyone in the person's network of friends, and increase the chances for new fans/new customers. What is at issue here is making so called viral marketing to occur. The word viral comes of virus and describes how malicious code is spreading on the Internet. Viral marketing is expected to start when fans of companies push like-buttons and share, which influence their friends to do the same with their friends in turn. This is supposed to go on, in an endless succession of social networks. However, this highly theoretical scenario requires that several conditions are met.

The first condition is already mentioned above, namely timing. The same applies here for entrepreneurs, if a person's friends shall see that the person liked a company or its updates directly in their feeds, they must be logged in to Facebook simultaneously. If not, given that the average user receives 30-40 updates daily, the information disappears into their feeds rather quickly, and become outdated. If any friends pay attention to the information there is no guarantee that they, in turn, will click the like-button just because one of their friends did. It depends on the following circumstances.

The second condition has to do with the nature of relationship with various friends. Not every one of the average user's 229 friends are really close friends with whom one trusts and shares similar opinions and tastes. With some luck, there may be a couple of really close friends among those who eventually happened to be logged in simultaneously or later noted that the person pressed the company's like-button. There is a chance that these close friends at least read the update, and one of them even liked it. Nevertheless, even if only one person outside the circle of fans can be reached by the company in this way, this is highly valued because it is a promotion that does not cost extra and maybe will start some kind of new relationship process. However, there are more conditions that may complicate the viral effect.

A third condition concerns how selective we are in relation to our friends. People with a high number of Facebook friends, sometimes choose to not see any updates at all from some of these. Perhaps they are not interested in receiving updates from them in their own feed and instead take a look sometimes in blocked friends' feeds. It may also be that they want to ration the amount of updates on their page because they do not have time to read everything that flows in.

A fourth, and related, condition is, instead of completely blocking updates from friends, blocking a certain type of updates, e.g. messages of commercial nature. As mentioned earlier, Clemons (2009) points out that users are reluctant to virtual social networks they experienced as market places. Furthermore, many users perceive Facebook communication as, first and foremost, a social genre. Commercial messages, even if they come from friends, may thus be perceived as genre deviant. The possibility therefore exists that selective people choose to block all of their friends' status updates that are related to their relationships with companies.

Claim 5: Conditions for Serving the Fans with an Offer When They are Ripe for a Purchase

The claim that the company has a good chance to give fans an offer that day they are ripe for a purchase is the most tempting claim, yet the most carefully

formulated. Tempting, because that is exactly what most companies want, careful, because *Fanboost.se* obviously cannot promise such a thing. The first four claims were framed as truths, in this case they dare just to give the company a “chance”. Unless they have asked their customers, companies are not in a position to know when customers are ready for purchase. Facebook does not make the company more capable to understand when customers are ready to buy services or products, unless they manage to get a working dialog with the users of their Fan page. In the case where they do not get explicit information, the dialog must be analyzed to determine who eventually is ripe for a purchase. Probably only large companies can afford such intelligence.

It is sales, and therefore return-of-investment, ROI, which motivates many companies to go all-in on social media. Professionals talk rather about return-of-engagement, ROE, with their clients. ROE indicates how many people interact with the brand, i.e. the frequency of like, share, and comments on a company's status updates, promotions, and events in Facebook. If the company is able to offer the fans something the day they are ripe for a purchase, they have to keep the fans so involved that they see the company's updates. Until the day they will get this special offer, the company has to get the fans to click the like-button at certain times, leave comments, and share their information. If they fail to maintain this level of commitment, the fans will no longer see the company's offers when Facebook's algorithm makes them disappear from the fans' logs. On the other hand, if the company does manage to get a good ROE, and often comes up on the fans' logs, then there is a chance that the fans see any offers – even those who may not be ripe for a purchase.

To summarize, if entrepreneurs get people to like their Facebook Fan page, claims are made that a series of benefits automatically will follow for their business: they reach everyone with their status updates, strengthen relationships with them, increase their credibility in the eyes of others, reach into their social networks, and can offer goods and services to customers ready for purchase. A critical analysis of these claims shows that all are highly conditional: it depends to a decisive extent on luck with timing, an industrious updating, inexhaustible ideas about how the fans will be involved, and plenty of time and patience to make all of this work. The actor making the claims, *Fanboost.se*, says nothing about these terms and conditions in their marketing communication directed toward an audience of young, aspiring, novice, and female entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was by means of a critical reading to determine whether the five statements about the benefits of getting people to click the Facebook Fan page like-button, can be achieved in the manner and to the extent claimed.

The actor who formulated the statements represents a niche group of entrepreneurs in the corporate sphere, who sell their knowledge of social media, mostly based on experience, to other entrepreneurs who lack this knowledge. They do this by producing texts with hands-on instructions, here referred to as management literature, based on the assumption that social media has only an upside of positive impact on marketing communications. The five critically examined statements can be said to be representative of the management discourse's general claims about what Facebook can accomplish and ultimately be monetized by corporate users. The statements show a straightforward causal link between getting users to click the like-button and achieving unconditional success, in getting the fans' full attention, strengthening the relation to them and the credibility of the company, to the viral effects into the their personal networks, until a final purchase. The result of the critical reading is that none of the five statements substantiate the claims: none is in fact unconditional. In all cases, several conditions must be met for the result to be what the sender states. The conclusion must be that the claims made, for the most part, deal with possible positive effects based on the potential of the technology, rather than on practical achievable benefits. The target group is not likely to achieve such by anything less than investing a lot of time, patience and never-ending ideas to keep their Fan pages alive.

Another objective of this chapter was to look at the relation between those possessing knowledge of social media and those lacking it. The relation is by definition a power relation in which those with knowledge can take advantage of their power in different ways. The claims under analysis do not show any particularly high quality, but concerns speculations rather than what is actually achievable. The conclusion to be drawn is that the knowledgeable advocates of the management discourse do not only exploit, but also abuse their power position. A more lenient way to express criticism can be based on trying to understand the nature of management discourse as more a matter of marketing than information. The aim is not just to inform the reader, but to sell a concept. The rhetoric has a certain kinship with manifesto literature critically examined by van Dijck and Nieborg (2009). The manifesto serves to convince readers about the only rational and even possible way to meet the future in a changing new world. The management discourse builds on the same apocalyptic starting point, but goes further by explaining how to easily win success with simple practical means. The strategy for persuasion in the manifesto tends to threaten the reader, whereas the strategy expressed in management literature is to offer promises. Through its relationship with advertising and marketing, management literature puts the emphasis on positive images and creates what Fill (2001) calls "likeable moments."

A final objective of this chapter has been to illuminate the corporate sphere, not only as heterogeneous and with elements of internal power relations, but

also to understand how powerful it actually is regarding commercializing media, i.e. social media in terms of monetizing social network platforms such as Facebook. The results of the critical reading support Clemons' (2009) and van Dijck's (2012) observations about the complexity and difficulty to monetize virtual social networks. It takes longer than profit-hungry entrepreneurs can wait, and users turn their backs to the platform if it is perceived as a marketplace. This means – in turn – that there may be relatively few corporate social networking sites that have the opportunity to take advantage of a free-working proletariat of users, and even less opportunity to convert them into commodities (Fuchs 2012). For this to happen, a Facebook Fan page must satisfy all three requirements for attention, popularity, and connectivity. As van Dijck (2012) shows, Facebook fulfilled the three requirements after several years' of patient work before they could monetize the platform. Therefore the political economy analysis of the commodification of users is mainly valid for the company Facebook and a number of other major media companies, and then in descending order, less valid or not at all for most companies that are fighting an often losing battle to monetize their efforts with social media, such as Facebook Fan pages.

This leads to a final reflection that goes back to Currans' (2012) observation that the New Economy has never created a level playing field for small and large businesses. In the beginning of the chapter, this was taken as a starting point for the assertion that social media has the potential to achieve such a playing field. However, the conclusion must be, based on previous research and the critical reading in this case that this seems to be and remains essentially just a potential.

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Should contemporary media culture be understood as a culture that offers unprecedented freedom for producing participators – so-called “prod-users”? Or should it rather be understood as a culture in which various forms of user participation in fact are conditioned, or even manufactured, by organized, professional producers?

Considering the increasing research attention that has been paid recently to various notions of mediated participation, most often with reference to social networking media or “web 2.0”, questions such as these are important to ask. They call attention to the need to both critically discuss and investigate the supposedly transformative potential of emerging media culture, which is based to a great extent on the applications that we have learnt to refer to as “social” media.

The contributions to this book, thirteen chapters from international scholars, add to our critical understanding of these new forms of media. They all draw on various theoretical concepts – such as producers, community, and participation – used when analysing media culture. But they also share a critical interest in problematizing and analysing the forms of power built into this culture.

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