

YOUNG PEOPLE ICTs AND DEMOCRACY

Theories

Policies

Identities

and

Websites

Edited by
Tobias Olsson and
Peter Dahlgren

NORDICOM

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Tobias Olsson & Peter Dahlgren (eds)

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Foreword

Behind every book is a story. Most of the chapters in this collection began their existence as presentations at a symposium that we the editors organised in Malmö, Sweden in April 2007. The symposium was in a sense a concluding event in a Swedish research project headed by the editors, *Young Citizens, ICTs, and Learning*. This project was funded by LearnIT, a research programme supported by the Knowledge Foundation of Sweden. We wish to express our great appreciation for the financing that made the project and the symposium possible, as well as contributing to the publication of this book.

The symposium was held as our participation in a new EU Sixth Framework project was deepening: *Young People, the Internet and Civic Participation (CIVICWEB)*, headed by Prof. David Buckingham. We wish also to acknowledge the inspiration provided by colleagues in that project for this effort.

Last but not least we wish to express our great gratitude to the publisher, Nordicom, for their helpfulness throughout our work with the manuscript, their professional way of finishing the book, and for their financial support of the project.

Lund in January 2010

Tobias Olsson

Peter Dahlgren

Introduction

Tobias Olsson & Peter Dahlgren

The year 2008 was definitely Barack Obama's year. Not only did he manage to be elected President of the USA, but all over the western world he also became an extremely salient character on the internet. Anyone who has doubts about the latter claim can make a test: combine the words "Obama" and "Web 2.0" in an internet search using any of the available search engines; our own attempt in November 2008 yielded 15 million hits!

What is further interesting is the fact that a lot of the highly rated hits from this search analyse the effects of "new media" and the internet – or more specifically the so called "Web 2.0", or the "social media" – on Obama's success in the elections. A huge number of these hits are preoccupied with discussing the significance of Obama's presence on *Facebook*, his appearances in the *blogosphere*, or his ways of handling other features that usually are connected to the concept "Web 2.0" for his successful campaign. Just a brief look at some of these hits reveals formulations such as: "Obama brought his campaign to 2.0-level" and "Obama hops on the Web 2.0 Bandwagon".

The exact significance of Obama's "Web 2.0-strategies" for the outcome of the election will surely become a theme of a huge number of scholarly debates to come, and as practitioners within the research field we are already looking forward to them. In the meantime, however, a lot of analyses within the blogosphere itself and within popular media have already decided on the issue: It *was* in fact Obama's abilities to make use of social media that secured his victory in the elections. Through the internet Obama managed to activate grassroots supporters, raise funding for his campaign, and also almost made personal contacts with important groups of voters – not least young people, who are thought to be those mainly populating the "Web 2.0". This was at least how it was commented upon in some popular media in various parts of the western world.

Whether one agrees with this opinion or not – to be sure, we are still talking about opinions here rather than facts, even though some of these analyses might appear to be very convincing – it is hard for us, as researchers within the field, not to see the obvious similarities between these claims about new, social media's (the Web 2.0's) significance for the campaign and the claims

made about the internet (in its Web 1.0 phase) way back in the middle of the 1990s. By then the “killer application” for the so-called new way of doing politics was called “e-mail”, today it is called *Facebook* or *Twitter*. In the 1990s the internet was often claimed to offer new ways of presenting one’s political message. Today, however, the Web 2.0 is said to come with a new way of offering political participation. In the 1990s there was a lot of excitement about the fact that websites offered new possibilities of expressing one’s opinions and identity, and today strikingly similar opinions are moulded about people’s abilities to start their own blogs – they offer a space for presenting oneself and one’s views on various issues.

The often quite striking similarities between the rhetoric surrounding Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are interesting for a number of different reasons. The similarities have to do, firstly, with the fact that the discussions on the Web 1.0 were theoretically very suggestive about the changes that the new ICT might be able to bring about in terms of social, cultural and not least political development. The discussions on the Web 2.0 have already also shown great promise in this respect, and will no doubt keep on producing equally thought provoking readings. Yet while doing that, the Web 2.0 discussions also risk reproducing a large number of the problems that were attached to the earlier theoretical debates on the significance of the Web 1.0. For instance, they tended to contribute to a mythologizing of the internet rather than to a thoughtful and critical analysis of what new, digital media might mean to the world as we once knew it (see for instance contributions in Loader 1997; Elmer 2002; Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002 for critical discussions on this theme). Furthermore, these early analyses were quite often technologically deterministic in their nature in their ways of trying to read off the effects of new media as consequences of their technological form (a point underscored by others as well: for instance Slevin 2000; Webster 2002; Goodwin and Spittle 2002).

This rhetoric – on the internet and its potential implications for society in general and for the sphere of politics in particular – has since the early 1990s been especially pertinent in regard to young people: it is the young, the grown-up citizens of tomorrow, who more than any other group will appropriate these new ICT technologies (Buckingham 2002; Buckingham 2006). This has become especially obvious with the use of such notorious new concepts such as “the e-generation”, “the messenger generation”, or “the internet generation”, which have been launched in effort to describe the internet’s transformative potential. Even though the generational concepts vary to some extent, they generally build upon the same logic: the analyses connect new ICT applications with young people and their specifically substantial use of them. With this connection established, the future becomes clear. From this point of departure the analyses then conjure up visions of how this generation is a forerunner of a new era that will change the world as we knew it.

From the title, the reader might assume that we are about to offer something similar to this with this book – speculative reflections on the significance of the internet (in its Web 2.0 shape) for young people’s political engagement and

participation. However, the reader expecting discussions about how the Web 2.0 will turn the world around will be disappointed. What this book offers instead is a set of theoretically and empirically well grounded analyses of questions concerning the ways in which the internet – in its 1.0, 2.0 or even 3.0 versions – interplays (or not) with young people's civic engagement and participation, and the implications of this more generally for democracy. Contrary to the emergent, mythologizing rhetoric of the revolutionary potential of the Web 2.0 when it comes to young people and democracy, the contributions to this book make use of established knowledge in the field – about late modern young people, about old and new forms of politics, and about new media – with the aim of deepening our understanding of young citizenship in the internet era. We – the editors as well as the individual authors of the various contributions to the book – all share the conviction that we can illuminate the internet's significance for politics and citizenship better by making use of a) good theories, b) critical analyses of policy debates, and critical, situated analyses of c) how users understand and apply the possibilities brought to them by the new ICT, and of d) what is actually happening on the internet.

We offer this collection as a contribution to a small but growing research literature that seeks to connect the themes of democracy, young citizens, and new ICTs (for other recent efforts, see Bennett 2007; Buckingham 2007; Dahlgren 2007; Everett 2007; Loader 2007). The book is also structured according to the four themes mentioned above: theories, policies, websites and identities. To be sure, theories do appear in all chapters, some of the “theoretical” chapters also present empirical material, and potential policy dimensions could be pointed out within pretty much all contributions, but the texts have been ordered from the point of view of their main emphasis.

The book's initial, theoretical section starts with a contribution from Natalie Fenton. In her chapter she points to the need for social science to “re-imagine” democracy in an era in which the internet offers possibilities to “do politics” in partially new ways for citizens in general and young citizens in particular. For instance, Fenton notes how well the network-like character interplays with the way transnational political movements organize themselves. Fenton argues that these new possibilities, supported by the internet, challenge social theory. Hence, she points to the need for well-informed theoretical reformulations of central, social scientific concepts such as “the public sphere”, “politics”, and “democracy”. In her conclusion she writes:

As nation states become increasingly draconian in their response to acts of civil disobedience; as new communication technologies enable disparate protest groups to forge transnational alliances and affinities; as capital becomes increasingly mobile and the power of nation-states is threatened (or some would argue, seriously diminished) we are faced with a new politics that is marked by the characteristics of multiplicity and polycentrality, interactivity and participation and demands new ways of thinking about democracy.

The second chapter, by Janelle Ward, continues to theoretically explore how the boundaries surrounding “the political” might be redrawn as we move further into the internet era: what forms of politics are made possible by the internet? And what forms of politics does the internet specifically support? In her chapter she argues for the need to analyse how the roles as citizen and consumer tend to blend together in new ways and puts special emphasis on how this blending is manifested on the internet. Ward develops a typology including three different kinds of “Citizen-Consumers” – “the Socially Conscious Consumer”, “the Critical Citizen-Consumer”, and “the Anti-Consumer” – which she describes, analyses and illustrates by help of three different websites. The bottom line of Ward’s theoretical discussion is the potential of the citizen-consumer notion to be realized more fully through the utilization of new technology.

The final chapter in this first section is the contribution by Nico Carpentier. Starting from a number of focus group interviews in which various audience segments have watched and discussed young producers’ amateur movies on the internet, Carpentier critically discusses the often claimed democratization of media production in the era of digital technologies. Despite the many – and often quite loud – techno-romantic appraisals for the internet’s inclusive character, in which everyone is seen as a potential producer, the focus group interviews suggest that the viewers themselves reproduce established distinctions between “amateur” and “professional” and between “banal” and “significant” cultural expressions in their ways of talking about and judging the young people’s amateur movies. In the final section Carpentier underscores that in spite of all the talk about empowerment and the celebration of anti-professionalism, discourses about professional media quality and about the ultimate banality of everyday life are still very much with us. And they serve to undermine cultures of democratic participation.

The second part of this book is devoted to ICT policy. The different chapters approach the same fundamental question: How can the new, digital media environment best be dealt with in terms of policy in order to stimulate young people’s civic engagement and participation? Stephen Coleman analyses two very often used policy models aiming at engaging young people in civic activities. On the one hand there is what he calls “managed e-participation”. This policy model sees the internet as a resource for strengthening young citizen’s connections to established political institutions and structures. On the other he points to “autonomous e-participation”. This model focuses mainly on young peoples’ civic participation via the internet outside of already existing political contexts and institutions. Coleman makes a critical reading of these two models, arguing that both of them have their obvious shortcomings. He states that neither of the models is “...well suited to achieving democratic outcomes”. Coleman then concludes the chapter by discussing the two models’ potential policy implications in the area of e-democracy.

In the chapter “As the World Spunks: Does Internet Help to Transform Youth Journalism” Linda Duits, Liesbet van Zoonen and Fadi Hirzalla present a study of a Dutch website called *Spunk* – an online magazine for young (15-19 years)

with news, discussion groups, and reviews. Ever since its start in 2003, the website has enjoyed support from The Dutch Press Fund, and this support has been motivated by the view it is different from other news media, since it offers “young people’s perception on the news and society”. Their analysis of the magazine, however, reveals a completely different view of the website. They find that: “Spunk neither produces a new citizen journalism of the young, nor does it contribute significantly to the diversity of the overall media landscape. Moreover [...] the content and form of the Spunk columns neatly fit mainstream discourses.” Against this backdrop the chapter enters into a critical discussion on, firstly, the criteria that inform The Dutch Press Fund’s support to the magazine, but also, secondly – and more generally – various criteria applied within normative media theories for evaluating media performance.

Maren Hartmann’s chapter on the key concepts of media literacy, media competence, and participation is a critical and forward-looking reading of major contributions about them in English and German. She pays special attention to media literacy and media competence in the era of “Web 2.0” in terms of both theory and practice. Her guiding question – of great significance for policy – becomes: what is the significance of the participatory architecture of Web 2.0 for young people’s media literacy and competence? Hartmann concludes her piece by reflecting on strategies for developing a “media literacy 2.0”. In particular, she finds that much of the difficulty with current discussions about the key concepts lies in the fact that explicit connections to users’ life-worlds remain under-developed. Moreover, our understanding would be enhanced by a stronger emphasis on project-based experiences, with a bottom-up perspective.

The three chapters in the third part of the book – Identities and Practices – all pay special attention to the significance of the internet for young people in their identities as citizens. Maria Bakardjieva explores the internet’s capacity to support everyday practices that can be relevant for citizenship. She starts from a discussion on the complexities of the concept of “the political” before analytically distinguishing between three levels of active citizenship: 1) formal institutional politics, 2) subpolitics, and her own category 3) subactivism. About subactivism she writes that it is found in “...the private sphere or the small world. It blends ethics and politics, or oscillates around the fuzzy boundary where one merges into the other ...” From this point of departure, she analyses interviews with internet users, probing subactivist dimensions of internet use in general, and practices associated with Web 2.0-applications, such as blogging and Facebook use, in particular.

In their chapter “Everyday Life and Internet in Diaspora Families: Girls Tell their Stories” Ingegerd Rydin and Ulrika Sjöberg also address young people’s creation of identity through the internet. More specifically, they explore how four young girls in Sweden, of immigrant background from various parts of the world, use the internet as a resource for navigating between their old and new national/cultural identities. By analysing the everyday lives of these young girls and their web practices, Rydin and Sjöberg shed light on how these young

girls create a sense of “here” and “there” through their internet use, how they become important links to Swedish society for their families, and how net use relates to their use of more traditional media (like TV and newspapers). The authors find that their informants could navigate beyond the mainstream discourses of society that circulate in the mass media, establishing for themselves communicative spaces that can enhance participation. Such ICT-based practices are emblematic of the importance for democracy of multiple spheres and voices, where marginalised groups can coalesce and gradually insert their voices into the larger society.

Asli Telli Aydemir and Bilge Selen Apak take up in their chapter contemporary political circumstances in Turkey, where the growing engagement of the younger generations in recent years, together with their use of ICT, is beginning to have some impact on democratic development. Specifically, they focus on the mobilisation of young citizens around the issue of the minimum age of 30 as a requirement for being an elected political representative. In Turkey, as in much of the rest of the world, young people generally show low interest in traditional party politics; the most visible activism tends to be extra-parliamentarian. In this case, however, the so-called Age 25 campaign was actually initiated by the Local Youth Parliaments in Turkey, which are organized on volunteer basis within local city councils, and then grew into a much broader youth-based movement. The authors trace how this issue snowballed from its origins in local municipalities to the national level, creating a network for young activists, as well as generating a platform for communicating with the larger public, with mainstream political actors, and the mass media. Their analysis is grounded in both social movement theory and the specific uses of ICT – not least the complementarity of on- and offline practices.

All three chapters in the concluding section have various websites as their empirical starting point: in what ways – if at all – do various websites offer resources for young people’s civic engagement and participation? Ulf Buskqvist’s chapter, “Spectators, Visitors and Actors – Addressing Young Citizens in Politics Online”, uses critical discourse analysis in analysing how different websites, from different societal spheres, address young citizens. He elucidates the ways in which Swedish media companies, political parties, and social movements represent politics. He looks first at how they address young people as citizens and, secondly, how they offer spaces for debates and participation. Buskqvist analyzes the similarities as well as the differences between the selected websites and discusses what he calls “the seductive myth of interactivity”. He finds that despite the optimistic rhetoric of Web 2.0, the prevailing climate on the internet tends to be dominated by resource-strong actors who mostly treat users as mass audiences.

Jürgen Habermas’ theories of the public sphere and communicative action provide a starting point for Anders Svensson’s chapter, “Young Men, ICTs and Sports: Fan Cultures and Civic Cultures”. In this chapter Anders Svensson examines the interaction and discussion between participants in an internet-based fan forum. He analyzes around 4 000 contributions to the discussion on

the Swedish ice-hockey team HV71 and concludes that – among other things – the discussions are rather inclusive, tolerant and self reflexive. Inspired by these results he engages in a discussion on the potential of this specific forum (as well as other similar fan forums) to serve as a resource for the creation of civic culture. Notably, he highlights the implicit ethical commitments to some sort of Habermasian communicative rationality here. The objectivity, rationality and the critical potential of these discussions manifest the values and practices of democratic deliberation, and thus, can be seen as laying the foundation for the civic cultural character of the forum.

The book's concluding chapter, "Invited but Ignored: How www.ungtval.se Aimed to Foster but Failed to Promote Young Engagement", by Fredrik Miegel and Tobias Olsson, is based on a study of a commercial, Swedish website that had the explicit aim to engage young people in politics. The website was a joint venture between the tabloid *Aftonbladet* and the by then (2006) largest commercial internet community for young people, *Lunarstorm*. The website was set up and analysed in time for the Swedish elections in 2006. The chapter builds on a study of the producers of the website, the website content, and a limited number of user interviews. The analysis reveals that the website's mission – to involve young people in politics and to talk about and to do politics in a way that suits young people – is only partially achieved. The young users are ostensibly invited to do politics "in their own way", but they are – once they get to the website – asked to think and do politics in a very traditional sense. Ultimately they are literally pushed into a party-political direction by the website, despite its rhetoric to offer alternatives.

The conditions of late modern democracy are evolving, and we are struggling to make sense of them. These contributions mobilise a number of different themes and emphasise a range of varying elements and dynamics that come into play. It is our hope that, taken together, this collection will help further our understanding of the complex interplays between contemporary social, cultural and political circumstances, young people in their roles as citizens, and the potential – and limits – of the new ICT.

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Part I
Theories

Chapter 1

Re-imagining Democracy

New Media, Young People, Participation and Politics

Natalie Fenton

In the age of the internet as more and more New Social Movements (NSMs) seek to organize and campaign on-line the question arises whether or not the internet can bring about a new form of political activism with consequences for the way we conceive of and carry out our political citizenship. The internet is now home to a multitude of groups dedicated to objecting to and campaigning against particular issues and politics. Public communications on-line are claimed to be part of the process of realizing the public sphere – a space where democracy can be enacted – allowing us to analyze how shared democratic values and identification as democratic citizens are achieved and maintained; how political/civic cultures are generated – essentially, to imagine how civil society can be organized democratically for politically progressive ends (e.g. Downey and Fenton 2003; Kahn and Kellner 2004). The internet is described as a mediated activity that seeks to raise peoples' awareness, give a voice to those who do not have one, offer social empowerment, allow disparate people and causes to organize themselves and form alliances, and ultimately be used as a tool for social change.

The internet is also a medium that is more readily associated with young people (e.g. Livingstone and Bovill 2002; Ester and Vinken 2003; Loader 2007); and young people are increasingly associated with disengagement from mainstream politics (e.g. Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995; Park 2004). The extensive literature that discusses young people and politics falls largely into two camps: one that talks of a disaffected youth and the other of citizen displacement (Loader 2007). In the former, studies speak of the decline of young people voting in conventional national party political elections as indicative of extensive alienation of young people from society's central institutions and warn of the long term dangers this may have (Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). In the latter, an engagement with traditional politics based on a sovereign nation state is displaced: "Young people are not necessarily any less interested in politics than previous generations, but [...] traditional political activity no longer appears appropriate to address the concerns associated with contemporary youth cultures (Loader 2007: 1). Rather, civil society or certain parts of it, become fore-grounded as

alternative arenas of public trust, information and representation. It is argued that politically motivated young people tend to look to non-mainstream political arenas often populated by NGOs and NSMs – alternative forms of political activism that work at the margins of the dominant public sphere (Hill and Hughes 1998; Bennett 2005; Kahn and Kellner 2004; Kahn and Kellner 2007). It is claimed that these forms of political engagement better fit the experience of social fragmentation and individualization felt by citizens (Loader 2007) as well as being compatible with the structure and nature of the internet.

The characteristics that have been claimed to mark out the internet as particularly suited to contemporary transnational political activism can be expressed by the dual themes of multiplicity and polycentrality; interactivity and cross border participation – these are outlined below. The nature of the politics exhibited on-line by NSMs is also marked by protest rather than political project (Fenton 2006). To some extent this is nothing new. Social movements have always been at the forefront of protest and demonstration. What is unprecedented is that this is now happening on a transnational basis, and at high speed, resulting in ever more complex networks of oppositional activism. The nature of these new struggles and the diversity of social relations that they embody reveal a multiplicity of relations of subordination and opposition. This reorganization of the space of politics not only encourages us to challenge the suggestion that because engagement in mainstream politics is declining amongst the young this translates into political disaffection; it also forces us to re-conceptualize our understanding of what constitutes the political in contemporary terms. In particular, the themes of multiplicity and polycentrality; interactivity and cross border participation are at odds with a deliberative democracy ideal and force us to rethink our conceptualization of the democratic nature of political participation in a manner that can better account for a diversity of political conflicts and struggles and articulate an agonistic politics.

This chapter considers the claims made for new media and the revival of oppositional politics in light of reconsiderations of the public sphere and the claims of a new politics of the 21st century. First, I consider the nature of these claims under the organizing themes of multiplicity and polycentrality and interactivity and cross border participation that I surmise sum up many of the assertions made in relation to the internet and its potential to enhance political participation with reference to the examples of the battle of Seattle, People's Global Action Organisation (PGA), the Institute of Global Communications (IGC) and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). Then I address the counter arguments for these claims by those who interpret multiplicity not as political pluralism but as political dissipation and fragmentation (Habermas 1998); and interactivity as illusive rather than deliberative (Sunstein 2001).

Many of these debates are set against the ethical horizon of Habermas' concept of the public sphere. Re-organization of the space of politics forces us to reconceptualise our understanding of what constitutes the political and the political public in contemporary terms. This chapter then turns to address some of these concerns in relation to Habermasian interpretations of the public

sphere raising critical concerns in terms of a politics based on difference and diversity, polycentric networks that resist a universal voice, cross geographical borders and work against universalizing narratives. Then, through a critique of the work of Hardt and Negri (2004) who have attempted to describe and critique this 'new politics' of the Multitude, I turn to Chantal Mouffe's work (2005) to rethink our conceptualization of the democratic nature of political participation in a manner that can better account for a diversity of political conflicts and struggles and articulate an antagonistic politics.

Multiplicity and Polycentrality

Klein (2000) argues that the internet facilitates international communication among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and allows protesters to respond on an international level to local events while requiring minimal resources and bureaucracy. This occurs through the sharing of experience and tactics on a transnational basis to inform and increase the capacity of local campaigns. According to Klein, the internet is more than an organizing tool. It is also an organizing model for a new form of political protest that is international, decentralized, with diverse interests but common targets. Although these targets are perpetually contested.

Salter (2003) claims that the internet is a novel technological asset for democratic communications precisely because of its decentred, textual communications system with content most often provided by users. On this basis it accords with the requisite features of new social movements (NSMs) that the internet is so often associated with. NSMs are more fluid and informal networks of action than the class and party politics of old. They are based in but spread beyond localities; are usually non-hierarchical, with open protocols, open communication and self generating information and identities. Such networks are often staunchly anti-bureaucratic and anti-centralist, suspicious of large organized, formal and institutional politics. In turn, the fragmentation of political culture is fuelled by the rise of identity that recognizes diversity and allows for differentiated notions of citizenship among diverse counter publics. NSMs share common characteristics with web based communication – they lack membership forms, statutes and other formal means of organizing; they may have phases of visibility and phases of relative invisibility; NSMs may have significant overlaps with each other and are liable to rapid change in form, approach and mission. Furthermore, the ability of new communication technologies to operate globally and so respond to global economic agendas from a variety of contingent social and political contexts signals a potentially limitless myriad of on-line voices that may or may not come together at key protest events.

One much quoted example is the anti-globalization (also referred to as the alter-globalization or social justice) movement that gained public recognition at what is now commonly referred to as "The Battle of Seattle". On 30 November 1999 an alliance of labour and environmental activists congregated in Seattle

in an attempt to make it impossible for delegates to the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference to meet. They were joined by consumer advocates, anti-capitalists and a variety of other grassroots movements. Simultaneously, it is claimed that nearly 1,200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 87 countries called for the wholesale reform of the WTO, many staging their own protests in their own countries (The Guardian Online, 25.11.99, p.4). Groups integrated the internet into their strategies. The International Civil Society website provided hourly updates about the major demonstrations in Seattle to a network of almost 700 NGOs in some 80 countries (Norris 2002). The Independent Media Center (www.indymedia.org) was established by various independent and alternative media organizations and activists for the purpose of providing grassroots coverage of the WTO protests in Seattle. The center acted as a clearinghouse of information for journalists, and provided up-to-the-minute reports, photos, audio and video footage through its website. The center also produced its own newspaper, distributed throughout Seattle and to other cities via the internet, as well as hundreds of audio segments, transmitted through the web and internet radio station based in Seattle. During the Seattle demonstration the site, which uses an open-publishing system, logged more than 2 million hits, and was featured on America Online, Yahoo, CNN, BBC Online among others. The demonstration was heralded as a success for transnational internet activism. Consequently, hundreds of media activists setup independent media centers (IMCs) in London, Canada, Mexico City, Prague, Belgium, France, and Italy over the following year. IMCs have since been established on every continent.

Interactivity and Participation

Civic and political participation are frequently understood as prerequisites for citizen-based democracies to flourish. Facilitation of participation is a crucial factor in transnational internet activism. But the interactivity of the internet can also impact upon the internal organization of the social movement organizations through forging alliances and coalitions across different movements, sharing best practice and most effective campaign techniques that can change the way groups organise and operate. Similarly, the protest activity and alliances of social movements on the ground can affect the way in which the internet is used and structured on the various and multiple websites. For example, the People's Global Action (PGA) organization, formed in 1998 by activists protesting in Geneva against the second Ministerial Conference of the WTO, and to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the multilateral trade system (GATT and WTO) is an attempt to create a worldwide alliance against neo-liberal globalization on an anti-capitalist platform. It is defined as "an instrument for communication and coordination for all those fighting against the destruction of humanity and the planet by capitalism, and for building alternatives" (www.agp.org, March 2007). So far, PGA's major activity has been

coordinating decentralised Global Action Days around the world to highlight the global resistance of popular movements to capitalist globalization. The first Global action days, during the 2nd WTO ministerial conference in Geneva in May 1998 involved tens of thousands in more than 60 demonstrations and street parties on five continents. Subsequent Global Action Days have included those against the G8 (18 June 1999), the 3rd WTO summit in Seattle (30 November 1999), the World Bank meeting in Prague (26 September 2000) and the 4th WTO summit in Qatar (November 2001). PGA describes itself as an instrument for co-ordination, not an organization.

The interactive and participative capability of the internet to speed up and increase the circulation of struggle, the *raison d'être* of PGA, has been argued as key to the success of some campaigns such as the anti-globalization movement (Cleaver 1999). This circulation benefits from decentralization and autonomy of individual groups/campaigns that are at once inclusive and diverse but produce a high degree of identification among citizens of the web. For example, the Institute of Global Communications (IGC) offers a website that allows people to subscribe to advocacy and lobbying groups, affiliate with the organization, receive e-mailed policy newsletters and action alerts, send faxes and emails to decision makers, circulate electronic petitions, learn about forthcoming street demonstrations, protest events, job vacancies and voluntary activities, as well as share effective strategies for activism, contribute news items and participate in on-line discussions. The IGC site, established in 1990, contains about 350,000 links in over 8,000 pages. Another site, established in the same year formed by various NGO and civil society networks – The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) describes itself as:

The first globally interconnected community of ICT users and service providers working for social and environmental justice.... whose mission is to empower and support organizations, social movements and individuals in and through the use of information and communication technologies to build strategic communities and initiatives for the purpose of making meaningful contributions to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability (<http://www.apc.org/english/about/index.shtml>).

APC currently (2007) has 36 member networks serving more than 50,000 activists, non-profit organizations, charities and NGOs in over 133 countries with a strong mix of Southern and Northern organizations. These large, decentralized and often leaderless networks facilitated by new communication technologies operate a form of politics that is based on the participation of all citizens rather than the hierarchical model of traditional politics (Fenton and Downey 2003). “Moreover, the essence of politics is considered the elaboration of ‘demands and responses’ – constructing identities rather than ‘occupying power’” (della Porta 2005: 201). The act of participation itself and engagement with a particular issue is the political purpose rather than social reform or direct policy impact.

Participation can be both on-line and off-line. But the on-line participation is often about moving people to action off-line. It is about building associations and forging affinities rather than simply providing information (Diani 2001). This form of networked politics links marginalized groups and builds counter discourses but endlessly resists the construction of a one-size-fits-all politics by insisting on the preservation of a multiplicity of political identities.

This is partially explained through an appreciation of the participation in new social movements being linked to disengagement with traditional party politics. In her extensive interviews with and questionnaires to activists della Porta (2005) discovers a relationship between mistrust for parties and representative institutions with very high trust and participation in social movements. The distinction between institutional politics and social movements rests upon the former acting as bureaucracies founded upon delegation of representation and the latter being founded on participation and direct engagement. This encourages us to move away from the notion of participative, deliberative democracy being realizable only through the traditional political structures of the nation state. If we think in terms of a decentred, polycentric democracy and reject the modernist version of a political project with a single coherent aim of social reform then "a more fluid and negotiable order might emerge, with plural authority structures along a number of different dimensions rather than a single location for public authority and power" (Bohman 2004: 148) for governance. Similarly, for Benkler (2006) the internet has the potential to change the practice of democracy radically because of its participatory and interactive attributes. It allows all citizens to alter their relationship to the public sphere, to become creators and primary subjects, to become engaged in social production. In this sense the internet is ascribed the powers of democratization.

The capacity to maximize connectivity and interaction is the political act. Local organizations confined to localized actions realize similar types of activity are taking place in locality after locality and by their participation they can contribute to reshaping these global networks for communication into global zones for interactivity (Sassen 2005).

Those who contest the political efficacy of online oppositional politics refer to the network society as producing localized, disaggregated, fragmented, diversified and divided political identities (e.g. Castells 1996). Taking Castells' view the fragmented nature of new media limits the capacity of new social movements creating coherent strategies due to the increasing individualization of labor. Problems of quantity and chaos of information challenge the way analysis and action are integrated in decision making processes as well as existing configurations of power and collective identity in social movement organizations.

Habermas registers his ambivalence towards new information and communication technologies as a potential source of equal and inclusive communication arguing that the internet may contribute to the fragmentation of civil society, as well as political mobilization and participation:

Whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an intersubjectively shared world and to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions from which political public spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating and acting subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented. The publics produced by the internet remain closed off from one another like global villages. For the present it remains unclear whether an expanding public consciousness, though centered in the lifeworld, nevertheless has the ability to span systematically differentiated contexts, or whether the systemic processes, having become independent, have long since severed their ties with all contexts produced by political communication (Habermas 1998: 120-121).

Greater pluralism is regarded by Habermas as a risk for deliberative democracy rather than its saviour. This concern is echoed by Sunstein, who argues that the internet has spawned large numbers of radical websites and discussion groups allowing the public to bypass more moderate and balanced expressions of opinion in the mass media (which are also, he argues, subject to fragmentation for essentially technological reasons). Moreover, these sites tend to link only to sites that have similar views (Sunstein 2001: 59). Such findings are supported by other empirical work, such as Hill and Hughes (1998). Sunstein argues that a consequence of this is that we witness group polarization (2001: 65) and this is likely to become more extreme with time. As such, Sunstein contends that two preconditions for a well-functioning, deliberative democracy are threatened by the growth of the internet and the advent of multi-channel broadcasting. First, people should be exposed to materials that they have not chosen in advance. This results in a reconsideration of the issues and often recognition of the partial validity of opposing points of view. Second, people should have a range of common experiences, in order that they may come to an understanding with respect to particular issues (Downey and Fenton 2003). In sharp contrast to Bohman (2004) and Benkler's (2006) analysis these arguments are framed by a particular understanding of democracy that accepts the institutional structures of representational politics and applies a liberal pluralism model of democratic practice inherent in Habermasian thought. Arguments such as these are based on an understanding of participative democracy that function through collective consensus and political projects that are problematic for a contemporary politics of the multitude. It is to this debate that we now turn in more detail.

Political Mobilization and the Public Sphere

Habermas' discussion of the public sphere is frequently invoked in political communication as an ethical horizon, something that has been lost and should be retrieved. Public spheres, conceived of largely within the confines of the nation

state, have replaced feudalism based on hierarchy through rational debate that can deliver deliberative understanding. A key aspect of Habermas' understanding of democracy is the right of citizens to engage freely in debate and come to their own rational, critical interpretation. The extension of this act of deliberation in a democracy is that the views of citizens are taken into account in political governance. The principle is that participation in public debate leads to deliberation by a citizenry that can impact upon political decision making. Habermas describes structural changes in society which led to the development of a public sphere but, in his earlier publications, underplays the part played by social movements, collective action and political conflict in shifting the terrain of political debate and of social policy (Fenton and Downey 2003; Ylä-Anttila 2006).

Recent analyses of the concept of the public sphere stress the competitive relationship between dominant (or common public sphere often interpreted as the mass media) and counter public spheres (or advocacy domain now seen as synonymous with alternative media or counter publicity that does not belong to the mainstream) (see Dahlberg and Siapera 2007). Whereas the dominant public sphere and advocacy domains may exist side-by-side in a liberal polity and contribute to the resolution of competing interests, counter publicity should be thought of as challenging the legitimacy of the dominant public sphere, as presenting an alternative way of ordering society as recognized in the work of Negt and Kluge (1972). Part of this counter publicity is in the act of resistance itself. Through boycotts, petitions and demonstrations political problems can be pushed on to the public agenda:

The formation of public spheres at the national level has required the formation of national social movements, with their repertoires of collective action, associational networks and cultural framing of political issues....collective action can thus be seen as a continuation of debate by other means. Boycotts, petitions, demonstration and other means of collective action co-ordinated on a national scale developed in tandem with the institutions and norms of public debate (Ylä-Anttila 2006: 425).

Habermas follows a similar line of thought in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Here, Habermas adapts his conceptual framework to conclude that counter public spheres can acquire influence in the mass media public sphere under certain conditions – namely in periods of crisis: “[I]n periods of mobilization, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically engaged public begin to vibrate. The balance of power between civil society and the political systems then shifts” (Habermas 1996: 379). In these circumstances Habermas concedes, counter public spheres may provide vital sources of information and experience that are contrary to, or at least in addition to, the dominant public sphere further building civil society and thereby offering a vital impulse to democracy (Downey and Fenton 2003). But this is only a partial concession by Habermas and misses the critical role of counter public spheres in establishing shifts in political culture.

This can be illustrated by returning to the role of media institutions in Habermas' public sphere. Media institutions circulate information and are thereby a vital input to the public sphere. Habermas shows how the geographic spread of trade resulted in information circulated in newsletters that evolved into the political press discussed in the cafes of the bourgeoisie. What he misses is the part played by political conflict and collective action in the development of media institutions. As Yla-Anttila notes (2006) before the French Revolution of 1789 there were 184 papers published, a year later the number had increased to 335. The revolutions across Europe in 1848 also led to a growth in press across the continent (Tarrow 1994: 54). It is not unreasonable to suggest that where there is political conflict, the means of circulating information will always be a primary aim – most recently of course this is apparent in the now infamous case of the Zapatistas in Mexico and the use of the internet to spread information and build solidarity.

Contemporary transnational social movements are a combination of collective action and public debate. The spaces of action and debate have shifted from local/national configurations and terrestrial media to "global" counter summits and the internet. The nature of these new types of oppositional spaces is only just beginning to be studied and described. As noted above, one of the striking differences between the counter publicity of transnational social movements and the counter politics of the nation-state is the lack of common identity and the rejection of unifying meta-narratives of organization. It is a movement of movements, a network of networks.

The political struggles that they represent are often far from rational and encourage affective rather than critical responses. Civil society is not always civil. It complies better with the description of a politics of antagonism forwarded by Mouffe (2005) than a deliberative liberal pluralism suggested by Habermas (1989). As Tormey (2005: 399) contends, rather than integrate multiplicity and conflict into its very fabric, liberal democracy, "makes a fetish of diversity and plurality of ends" and of incommensurability and antagonism, asserting the need for multiple voices to be heard and resolved through the institutions of the state. In this manner,

The contest of ideas and ideals is not at the heart of liberalism. It is at the heart of the rhetoric of liberalism. Values and ideals may be contested; but this does not mean that we can meaningfully contest the "freedom" of the market, the rationality of representation, the monopolizing nature of anti-monopoly legislation, the tyranny of "choice" (Tormey 2005: 400).

But even if we accept that through political conflict associational networks can emerge and civil society be established, the problem remains – how can fragmented and multiple oppositional groupings function together for political ends? But this is still political ends in the plural. One end point may be the pursuit of protest in and for itself, another maybe to progress from a resistant identity to a political project that is sustainable and likely to produce social

change. Put another way, it is either a conception of democratic participation that conforms to the existing rules and conventions of debate or one that challenges those rules. This is the subject of constant discussion within NSMs – put crudely should they be reformists accepting of the rule of representative democracy and the structures of the nation state or revolutionaries who refuse to play by established rules and conventions preferring to challenge and question the basis on which those rules are enacted and normalized? The question that always arises out of these debates is whose revolution and whose ideas of reform. Many contemporary counter public spheres reject the reduction of political action to the construction of a single endpoint that infers a rational, exclusionary approach whereby all other potential endpoints are dismissed as ill-conceived or wrong.

Political action understood simply as the delivery of a homogenous ideal (such as a democratic public sphere) removes uncertainty and unknowability and reduces politics to the “administration of things” (Bhabha 1994). It is seen as removing creativity from political action. Contemporary political activists talk of creating autonomous spaces of imagination and creativity¹ that are contingent, open and unpredictable – an attempt to escape ideological politics and move to a dialogical politics where we continually acknowledge difference and learn from others. The political premise is one of anti-reductionism that refuses a monological process or vision. Such forms of resistance are often united by a shared perception of an injustice rather than a common, determinate vision of a “better world” that may follow.

But as feminist theorists have noted (Braidotti 1991; Fenton 2000; Spivak 1992), for political efficacy there must be more than the apparent freedom that comes with embracing difference and diversity, more than just an increase of instances of mediated protest or opposition. Even if we accept the possibility for fragmented and multiple oppositional groupings that can create their own political interventions via the internet, we still have to broach the next stage: how will a politics of solidarity in difference be realized and sustained? Social solidarity can be described as a morality of cooperation, the ability of individuals to identify with each other in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity without individual advantage or compulsion, leading to a network of individuals or secondary institutions that involve the creation of social and political bonds such as the anti-globalization movement. There must be a commitment to the value of difference that goes beyond a simple respect and involves an inclusive politics of voice and representation. It also requires a non-essentialist conceptualization of the political subject as made up of manifold, fluid identities that mirror the multiple differentiations of groups.

Such mediated solidarity is evident in the research of social movement theorists. Tarrow and della Porta (2005: 237) refer to the interconnections between on-line and off-line participation as “rooted cosmopolitans” (people and groups rooted in specific national contexts but involved in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts); “multiple belongings” (activists with overlapping memberships linked with polycentric networks); and “flexible identi-

ties” (characterised by inclusiveness and a positive emphasis on diversity and cross-fertilisation) (Keck and Sikkink 1998; della Porta and Diani 1999). Tormey (2005) notes that the politics at play here favours a praxis of micro-power and a micro-politics of and in everyday life directed against the master-signifier of ideological thought and “by extension the coalescence of revolutionary struggle around some agreed place that it was the task of the ‘movement’ to build or construct” (Tormey 2005: 403).

We can also see this perspective echoed in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988: 469-473) that argues against “majoritarianism”, the notion that there must be some scheme, project, goal or telos around which “we” can be united, preferring a minoritarian stance that pursues “univocity” and rejects the ultimately essentialist and pointless search for a universal blueprint. In order to resist incorporation into the dominant ideal there is a necessity to generate spaces in which micro-politics can become established and thrive. Such spaces of affinity and creativity, they argue, have the potential to develop an activist rhizomatics – a network of micro-politics that can converge, multiply and develop without an ideology or a strategy – a space that is predicated on learning, solidarity and proliferation. This has been referred to as ‘swarming’ whereby networks of affinity and association integrate and form multiple resistances and actions. In other words the *space* of political activity is enlarged, the rhizome extends outwards drawing in difference, plurality and embracing uncertainty. Solidarity spreads on the basis of a shared sense of injustice rather than a shared vision of an alternative world. Similarly, Virno (2004) in his theorizations of the “multitude” claims such spaces as the “right of resistance” – a community that is antagonistic in its collectivity.

New Politics or Anti-politics?

The work of Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004) attempts to broach a politics of the Multitude and has become a source of validation and direction for many (young) people involved in transnational social movements. Hardt and Negri (2004) call on us to reclaim the concept of democracy in its radical, utopian sense: the absolute democracy of “the rule of everyone by everyone” (ibid. 307). The multitude, they argue, is the first and only social subject capable of realizing such a project. They propose a description of the multitude as “an open network of singularities that links together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce” – a union which does not, however, in any way subordinate or erase the radical differences among those singularities. A network analysis well suited to the webbed communication of the internet.

Empire, by colonizing and interconnecting ever more areas of human life creates the possibility for democracy of a sort never before seen. Brought together in multinodal forms of resistance, different groups combine and recombine in fluid networks expressive of “life in common” (2004: 202). In other words, they form a multitude. The Multitude is a heterogeneous web of workers, migrants,

social movements, and non-governmental organizations – “potentially [...] all the diverse figures of social production” (ibid. p. xv), “the living alternative that grows within Empire” (ibid. p. xiii). The Multitude is not the people *per se*, but rather many peoples acting in networked concert. Because of both its plurality and the sharing of life in common controlled by capital it is claimed that the Multitude contains the composition of true democracy.

Hardt and Negri argue that the shift from industrial to post-industrial societies has been accompanied by a shift in the dominant form of labour, from industrial labour to more “immaterial” forms of work – the production of social relations, communication, affects, relationships and ideas. It produces and touches on all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life. They call this “newly dominant model” “biopolitical production” (2004: xvi). This shift is profoundly reorganizing many aspects of our lives, including the very ways we interact and organize ourselves. They propose that this labour increasingly produces “the common” – a central concept to their thesis and the basis upon which any democratic project will be built. The Multitude’s ability to communicate, form alliances and forge solidarity – often through the very capitalist networks that oppress it – allows it to produce a common body of knowledge and ideas that can serve as a platform for democratic resistance to Empire, a union which does not in any way subordinate or erase the radical differences among those disparate groupings. As Oswell (2006: 97) states:

[I]f the people are defined by their identity, relation to sovereignty and represented homogeneity, the multitude in contrast is defined through its absolute heterogeneity and through its being a congregation of singularities.

Hardt and Negri (2004) see one of the political manifestations of globalization as the declining autonomy of the nation state with power shifting simultaneously towards inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization (WTO), and downward toward regional and local assemblies (Held 1999). The shrinkage of the state through initiatives such as privatization, marketization and deregulation means that decision making has flowed away from public bodies and official government agencies that were directly accountable to elected representatives, devolving to a complex variety of nonprofit and private agencies operating at local, national and international levels. It is claimed that it has become more difficult for citizens to use conventional state-oriented channels of participation, exemplified by national elections, as a way of challenging those in power, reinforcing the need for alternative avenues and targets of political expression and mobilization. They point to anti-globalization and anti-war protests as exercises in democracy motivated by people’s desire to have a say over decisions that impact upon the world in which they live – operating at a transnational level. However, their call for a “new science of democracy” (2004: 348) is difficult to pin down. Exactly how the multitude can stand up and be counted is never set out. Laclau (2004) has called this the antithesis of politics – an agency that does not articulate, repre-

sent or strategize. This is utopia without architecture and universality without meaning. A movement of antagonistic constitution does not offer direction on how such a community of diversity is organized it merely enacts the right of resistance. But, as Mouffe (2005) contends enacting the right of resistance, revealing political struggle and conflict in a diversity of forms is crucial to the actual practice of democracy that can lead to multiple forms of unity and common action. The more acts of resistance, the more various the forms of struggle, the better possibility there is for appeal to a wide a range of political actors and thus to the potential for many instances of unity.

Mouffe (2006) argues against an understanding of democracy that operates under the illusion of consensus and unanimity believing that this results in a lack of political struggles with which people can identify – a void which is then open to other forms of identification such as those of an ethnic, nationalist or religious nature. It also leads to a direct association of liberal democracy with “actually existing liberal democratic capitalism”, whereby the political dimension is instilled within the rules of law and the sovereign nation state. Rather she contends:

There is no threshold of democracy that once reached will guarantee its continued existence. Democracy is in peril not only when there is insufficient consensus and allegiance to the values it embodies but also when its agonistic dynamic is hindered by an apparent excess of consensus [...] A healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests. If such is missing, it can too easily be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values and essentialist identities (Mouffe 2006: 6).

Mouffe seeks a radical plural interpretation of liberalism that will break with rationalism, individualism and universalism and see the political as a complex of power relations that is necessarily plural and discursively constructed.

Conclusion

As nation states become increasingly draconian in their response to acts of civil disobedience; as new communication technologies enable disparate protest groups to forge transnational alliances and affinities; as capital becomes increasingly mobile and the power of nation-states is threatened (or some would argue, seriously diminished) we are faced with a new politics that is marked by the characteristics of multiplicity and polycentrality, interactivity and participation and demands new ways of thinking about democracy.

The growing “civic disengagement” of young people from state politics – the kind of politics that has been developed through modern history to fit and serve the political integration into “nation-states” – along with the development of new communication technologies, has shifted political interests and hopes

to new terrains that are borderless and global; a kind of politics well suited to the internet. These political forms are also sorely under-regulated and ethically and politically uncontrolled. Can ethically under-regulated and politically uncontrolled global counter politics produce a universal ethics with particular relevance within and across borders as Hardt and Negri contend?

Bauman (1999; 2002) emphasizes that caring for the preservation of diversity is the very purpose of shared politics. If separate identities refuse exclusivity they abandon the tendency to suppress other identities in the name of the self-assertion of one's own, while accepting that it is precisely the guarding of other identities that maintains the diversity in which their own uniqueness can thrive. As Mouffe (2006) asserts there is the potential for multiplicity to be interpreted as diversity and translated into political inclusiveness. But if we are to do so then we need to recast democracy.

A Habermasian approach to the public sphere rests on an understanding of liberal pluralism as ultimately a quest for consensus politics. A desire to discuss and deliberate on public issues and reach a common understanding of the way forward based on "a procedure to which all consent" (Habermas 1996: 496). The process is one of reaching constitutional agreement. Retaining an emphasis on multiple view points or a plurality of political cultures or potential solutions does not fit with a model of deliberative democracy. From a Habermasian perspective, to insist on the multiplicity of subject positions and to resist socialization into a common political culture is to breakdown into fragmentation and dissolution of the political – one group's oppositional politics is neutralized by another's in a reductive competition of activism. To avoid interpreting multiplicity as fragmentation and dispersal of political efficacy but rather as an inclusive politics of difference and diversity, I have argued that we need to consider concepts of democracy and a form of politics that are deliberative, participative and *antagonistic* (see Mouffe 2005). To be able to deliberate we must have the ability to choose between different types of political praxis; to be able to participate we must have both the socio-economic capacity and an acceptance of difference; and if we think of protest as being a crucial element in political deliberation – political struggle and antagonism as being at the heart of politics then we can also begin to re-think democracy as a radical and plural project.

Networks are not democratic institutions; they do not apportion membership or citizenship; they do not conform to legislative models of governance or a representative model of election. And it is partly these characteristics that make them attractive to young people – they are both different from conventional state-bound politics and they embrace difference. Networks do not work on the basis of consensus-building. If there is a new politics emerging in new media it is a politics of non-representation; a politics of affect and antagonism. It includes a multiplicity of experiences that are contradictory and contingent. But they can and do effect social change and impact on political cultures. To better appreciate young people, participation and the nature, form and consequences of this contemporary oppositional politics, we need to re-imagine democracy and take on board anti-essentialist, antagonistic, radical plurality.

Note

1. This is particularly evident at the World Social Forum (WSF) and European Social Forum (ESF).

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Chapter 2

Purchasing or Protesting?

Expanding the Notion of the (Online) Citizen Consumer

Janelle Ward

Democratic theory has long held the normative idea that in order for it to thrive, people should participate in various ways. This participation mainly entails involvement in traditional politics such as voting, running for office, or being knowledgeable about the issues. More recently, broader definitions are emerging as to what constitutes political engagement or participation. In this widening and alternative realm, it is possible to locate identity politics, social movements, issue-specific activism, and the notion of political consumerism.

Taking traditional notions of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society, there are wide perceptions of declining civic and political engagement among young people. This is mainly evident in the activities such as low voter turnout and disinterest in and apathy towards traditional politics. Specifically in relation to youth, this is seen as worrisome because young people are in the process of developing the ways in which they will view themselves as citizens throughout their lifetime (Livingstone 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996).

Different arguments have been put forth to find solutions to this problem. Some shift the blame to political elites: "It is not young people that are disconnected from formal politics, but political institutions that are disconnected from young people" (Coleman and Rowe 2005: ii). Others argue that expanding the definition of what is "political" will reveal new forms of engagement and participation that previously existed outside traditional boundaries (Dahlgren 2003). At the same time, people perceive themselves increasingly as individuals within society, and sometimes voice their concerns more according to personal preferences than the group good. The notion of risk society, where society is structured in relation to its perils, is made apparent through developments in science and industry, resulting in consequences that are global in nature and no longer country specific (Beck 1992). New conceptualizations of citizenship fall within the realm of "new", "single issue", "postmodern" (Inglehart 1997) and "lifestyle" politics (Giddens 1991), in comparison to more traditional citizenship traits like voting or possessing an understanding of party politics.

Often, the application of these concepts is connected with new technologies. Some say that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) may help to

address perceived disengagement. These arguments take two directions: One view sees ICT as facilitating traditional forms of political engagement; the other sees their contribution as more relevant to addressing new forms of citizenship. From the first claim follows that online technology may be able to capture the interest of youth – already active online and knowledgeable about high tech communication (Ward *et al.* 2003) – which will then transfer to increased rates of traditional participation. Allow a young adult to register to vote online and she will vote, provide political party information on a website, and she will read up on the issues and become a more involved member of society. A great deal of research has examined the content of such political websites, both in general (Gibson *et al.* 2003; van Selm *et al.* 2001; Ward and Gibson 2003) and focused on youth (Bennett and Xenos 2004; Macintosh *et al.* 2002; Montgomery *et al.* 2004; Ward 2005). Others have however found that politics online simply mirrors politics offline (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

However, if from a theoretical viewpoint democratic society is evolving and is, for example, becoming more individualistic and tied to lifestyle, and online technology allows for more interactive, global forms of communication that can facilitate information sharing and networking of these shifting democratic views, then it also seems relevant to address how ICT can be used to support more non-traditional notions of citizenship. Some argue that unconventional political organizations (social movements, for example) with a looser structure thrive on the many-to-many variety of communication that is found online (Bennett 2003c). Research supporting ICT use geared towards non-conventional citizenship examines young people's attitudes towards participation and their use of new technology. These scholars show that youth do engage with public affairs, although outside of traditional institutions (Coleman and Rowe 2005). They are, for example, apt at seeking online information (Rainie and Horrigan 2005) and forming online networks around current issues (Smith *et al.* 2005). Through an extensive study of youth engagement websites in the United States, Montgomery *et al.* (2004) describe what they call a youth civic culture, demonstrated in sites that deal with traditional political issues but also focus on global issues and activism.

With online forms of communication, youth discover innovative ways of gathering information, interacting with others, and producing their own content, referred to by some as "power creators" (Lenhart *et al.* 2004). Young people are often at the core of rising alternative forms of engagement and participation and are involved in activities such as culture-jamming, virtual communities, online protest and blogging.

However, youth are not primarily using the internet for political information activism. E-commerce is a rapidly growing industry, but rather than using corporate websites for shopping, young people also seek out these websites for other purposes. For example, Holloway and Valentine (2001) find that British youth commonly enjoy browsing "Americanized" websites of the commercial, global, and branded variety. Corporations often boast sophisticated online spaces that speak to consumer identities through the brand images they pro-

mote. Habitually, such online spaces may not have been considered a typical place to look for prerequisites to civic and political engagement, but perhaps individuals are seeking these online spaces as more than consumers.

Globalization has in part accelerated with the ability to communicate with anyone in the world (that possesses the proper technology) in a split second. If individualism is spreading, then individuals around the world are now able to pursue their personal interests with a global group of like-minded people. According to new definitions of engagement, knowledge building and even political action can potentially occur while sitting behind one's computer. Globalization has also had another impact: Corporations, both on- and offline, hold worldwide influence. Although traditionally found in economic spheres and primarily regulated by governments, their increasing global nature and ability to operate outside the nation-state has made them a growing part of consumer's – but also citizen's – lives. At the same time, the days of the "passive consumer" are diminishing and corporations are increasingly dealing with "prosumers", individuals who demand a say in what is sold to them and how it is marketed (Salzman 2000). There is an increasing association between citizen and consumer; the term is even seen within the communications framework in the UK, where the new regulatory body (The Office of Communications, Ofcom) refers to the public as citizen-consumers. At the same time, interviews with elites show a deep tension between these terms, primarily in terms of how citizens are viewed and how to serve the interests of both (Livingstone *et al.* 2007).

Keeping in mind how the above-described concepts are viewed in relation to youth, this chapter explores the link between political consumerism and citizenship and discusses ways in which a combination of these elements can be considered. It argues that the citizen-consumer should be viewed as a multi-level concept, separating notions such as purchasing, protesting and modes of address. It presents a preliminary typology that addresses the complexities of these issues, and examines these conceptualizations of the citizen-consumer on relevant websites in order to demonstrate how each identity is addressed online. The chapter concludes with a discussion into issues of concern as well as ideas as to how this initial typology could potentially be expanded in future research.

Addressing Consumers as Citizens

The business corporation, that is, an artificial legal entity with legal rights and duties, is primarily concerned with profit, and with that, how its image or brand is publicly portrayed. Corporations are primarily responsible to their shareholders while, on the other hand, democratic governments are responsible to their citizens. It may therefore seem odd to claim that consumer behavior is increasingly being tied to knowledge, attitudes and behavior found within the realm of citizenship. The idea of combining citizenship with consumer behavior is not new – for years, citizens have used their purchasing power to make political

statements, such as with Ralph Nader's Modern Consumer Movement – but has been revitalized recently due to, among other things, globalization of corporate and media systems and evolving notions of democracy.

Another main reason for this current link is the rise in “socially conscious” corporations. Corporate social responsibility is a term that has existed since the 1950s and since that time has undergone complex definitional change (Carroll 1999). Simply put, corporate social responsibility is how a corporation operates within a business model to produce a positive influence within society. Some say this trend is a reaction to changing consumer behavior, as consumers increasingly use their spending power to assert their values as citizens in a democratic society (Roddick 2001).

Why do corporations feel a need to be more responsible, both in their business practices and to their customers? One explanation turns back to globalization. Corporations have always wielded some level of power within their own countries or governments, but as Scammell notes: “Globalization makes corporate power explicit...by drawing attention to their capacity to escape state regulation, they inadvertently highlight their own responsibility for good or ill...in the process, they politicize consumption” (Scammell 2000: 353). Beck (2000) says that corporations have the ability to engage in what he terms sub-politics; globalization allows them to circumvent government regulation because of access to global labor markets and other resulting economic advantages. Because of this increasing corporate power, the citizen is aware that traditional political behavior within the nation state will not adequately influence the growing issues of sweatshops, environmental destruction, and other problems inherent in a global marketplace. She then sees (but is also led to see) the simple action of purchasing a particular good – and thus purchasing what that good stands for – as potentially a political act.

The citizen-consumer represents: “[A] model of citizenship, with some of the classical republican dimensions of civic duty, public-spiritedness, and self-education” and “is an increasingly apt description of consumer behavior” (Scammell 2000: 352). The argument goes that consumers – if they are socially conscious and think of themselves as citizens when making purchasing decisions – are operating within a model of citizenship rather than one of consumerism. So a citizen-consumer is a smart shopper. She is aware of the brands that she wears and what they truly stand for, and she exercises her spending power in a socially responsible way. Consequently, as corporations continue to leave behind the regulation of the nation state, the citizen-consumer will increasingly become an important counterbalance.

Are Consumers Really Citizens?

However, there is another way to view this shift to socially responsible corporate behavior. Consumers may be behaving as concerned citizens, but where does the need to be a “good” citizen come from? Current political theory argues

that, particularly among youth, lifestyle and single-issue concerns are becoming politicized, but does this shift towards social responsibility reflect a reaction by corporations to citizens, or simply a new way to sell products?

Commodification occurs when something is turned into a good and it is judged as such within the market. Corporations exist in order to make a profit, and are thus concerned with commodities. In this respect, socially conscious consumption has been commodified: "Commercial success in affluent markets is increasingly linked to the treatment of the consumer as a concerned citizen" (Scammell 2000: 354).

If socially conscious consumption has become a commodity, then corporations are at an advantage to market their brands as such. As Klein (1999) argues, it is easier to harness media coverage – and thus, citizen attention – by attaching political messages to well-known brands and lifestyle symbols; further, using these brands makes those normally averse to political action more likely to see a connection with their consumer identity. The tactic of making people feel good about what they consume exists from both political elites (i.e., making citizens feel good about their political participation, as in praising adherence to civic duty through voting) and from corporations (i.e., making consumers feel good about their purchasing decisions, in this case appealing to them as citizens rather than as purely materialistic consumers).

In advertising, hyperrealism (Goldman and Papon 1994) makes use of sophisticated marketing techniques to allow the consumer to deduce the meaning of an advertisement and respond affirmatively to the message sent by a particular product or brand. The consumer is offered certain social roles that work to empower her; these could include "chooser", "communicator", "identity-seeker", "hedonist", "rebel", "activist", and even "citizen" (Gabriel and Lang 1995, as quoted in Rumbo 2002). The consumer is let know that if she responds (i.e., purchases a product) to advertising that makes her a socially conscious consumer, she will therefore consume in a socially responsible way, thus satisfying her responsibilities as a citizen.

But does such consumption relate to citizenship? Bennett (2003a: 6) says that even for those citizens who are not interested or even actively avoid politics: "their fashion statements and product choices may matter in social image terms". Is social image enough to count as good citizenship? The citizen-consumer argument already assumes that consumers are operating within a citizenship model when purchasing such goods. But is this really the case? Is the consumer truly acting as an aware, informed citizen simply by purchasing products that are marketed as socially conscious? Or is she merely satisfying an internal, "feel good" mechanism set off by marketing practices intended to do just that?

The question of whether or not socially conscious consumption translates to citizen behavior and whether it truly fits the model of a citizen-consumer is at the heart of the reason a citizen-consumer typology is necessary. In order to attend to these larger questions, I propose to distinguish different identities inherent within the citizen-consumer concept. The concept now includes those who engage in socially conscious consumption (i.e., purchasing), but,

in my view, these individuals should be distinguished from those more critical of sophisticated marketing techniques and carefully crafted press releases that actively participate in holding corporations accountable (i.e., protesting). Within such a context it is also worth mentioning individuals who are adamantly opposed to consumerism as a lifestyle; they actively oppose corporate behavior but do so through more radical means, and more strongly advocate a vision of an alternative reality. What role do they play in an environment of political consumerism?

At the same time, particularly young people are involved in political consumerism (Stoole *et al.* 2005 cite Andersen, 2000; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen 2001; Sörbom 2002) and are also embracing global forms of communication made possible through the internet. Within a globalized world, it becomes necessary to be aware of and address those institutions with growing power – such as corporations and those that oppose them – and one way to do this is online. Drawing on the theoretical considerations outlined above, I present a three-part typology, highlighting different dimensions of the citizen-consumer: the Socially Conscious Consumer, the Critical Citizen-Consumer and the Anti-Consumer.

The Citizen-Consumer: A Typology

Before presenting the typology I will mention three websites that will be used within the typology as examples: The Body Shop, Friends of the Earth, and Adbusters. Each of these is relevant for its place within the theoretical argument, but also for a (at least partial) focus on youth¹ and a particular manner of address online as detailed in the following sections. The Body Shop is particularly known for its claims to social responsibility and represents the type of online information relevant to the Socially Conscious Consumer. Other research has examined similar corporation messages online, in terms of content and design (Robbins and Stylianou 2003) and in communicating corporate ethics (Pollach 2003) and social responsibility (Esrock and Leichty 1998). Friends of the Earth, a UK-based environmental network, is related to the second type, the Critical Citizen-Consumer. Finally, Adbusters, a social activist movement, represents an appeal to the third type, the Anti-Consumer. Research has taken various approaches to investigating such comparable websites and actors. For example, Bennett (2003a) studied online activist networks in relation to Nike and Microsoft, Smith and Smythe (2000) analyzed the role of the internet during the WTO protests in Seattle, and Rumbo (2002) performed an “offline” analysis of Adbusters.

It is worth noting that websites are difficult to choose based on a national context because of their global nature (as is often the case of the corporation, organization or network behind the online presence). In the first two examples I focus on the UK versions of these websites in order to locate a similar cultural and language base for content. The Adbusters website is an exception, as the majority of relevant information is located on its main (Vancouver-based) site; it

does not maintain specific country websites but rather networks itself in other countries through similar, though often more broadly focused, organizations (e.g., Indymedia UK). The purpose of this exploration is not to generalize findings to other websites. Rather, it is to demonstrate through a number of concrete examples what is happening online, and discuss how the various conceptualizations of the citizen-consumer are present in the online realm. The next section provides a detailed description of the introductory typology, which works to further specify the definition introduced earlier by Scammell.

1) The Socially Conscious Consumer

The Socially Conscious Consumer can be defined as “[A] consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change” (Webster 1975: 188). She makes an effort to purchase products that are fair trade, made from recycled products, or are not tested on animals. This consumer feels empowered by her purchasing decisions, perhaps because she views her consumption as political and the act of a “cool citizen”, one that enjoys “the choice and pleasures of consumer society but [does] not want to support the bully over the little guy” (Scammell 2000: 353). Perhaps certain brands are a large part of her daily life so she needs to be more involved in the product’s image because it is a part of her own identity. How much this translates into the realm of citizenship is debated, since this consumer restricts the exercise of social consciousness to her wallet, and her education to corporate messages.

As noted, one growing information source is the internet. For example, online shopping means that an individual can buy almost anything from any location in the world; she can request more specialized products, set her own price requirements and demand stringent delivery dates. At the same time – as a Socially Conscious Consumer – she may not actively seek information about the products she purchases in order to be reassured that she is making a responsible buying decision, but she has found that corporate claims to social responsibility are a common part of online rhetoric, and this is assuring to her identity as a Socially Conscious Consumer.

One example of such a corporate website is The Body Shop.² It began in the UK as a cosmetic store and has now spread worldwide. The founder of the Body Shop, Anita Roddick, has received global attention for her interest in corporate environmental issues and human rights violations. The Body Shop is particularly known for its claim that it does not test its products on animals, and it uses ecologically sustainable production methods. These claims are a primary angle in its marketing.

The Body Shop’s website is typical of what one would expect from a successful commercial enterprise. A professional, streamlined design is coupled with a homepage filled with product offers, discounts, and gift ideas. In the bottom right corner of the homepage, a “Made with Passion TM” hyperlinked logo is followed by the following text:

Against Animal Testing
Support Community Trade
Activate Self-Esteem
Defend Human Rights
Protect Our Planet

Clicking on this link opens up a new page that provides more information on “Our Values; Our Campaigns; Our Charity; and Our Principles and Policies.” For the Socially Conscious Consumer, this information could provide reassurance that purchasing a Body Shop product does indeed make her a responsible citizen-consumer.

The Body Shop addresses the Socially Conscious Consumer as an individual; by providing information about their social commitments, they encourage the visitor to support such commitments, by independently purchasing the products. Knowledge about the Body Shop’s policies is geared towards building or cementing positive attitudes towards the company that result in higher profits but also a personal sense of satisfaction from the Socially Conscious Consumer.

However, despite their claims to support environmental practices as well as developing world working conditions, social movements (e.g., Greenpeace) and even investors have criticized the Body Shop for hypocritical practices. Additional skepticism was raised when recently (in March 2006) the Body Shop was taken over by L’Oréal, a French cosmetics group. Such criticisms point to a need for citizen-consumers with a more critical stance on corporate social responsibility, as will be shown next.

2) The Critical Citizen-Consumer

The Critical Citizen-Consumer acts as a Socially Conscious Consumer when purchasing products marketed, for example, as fair trade or biological. However, she is also more critical of marketing techniques that address her in this way, and recognizes the need to ensure that her purchasing power is not being used just to support products that are advertised with such campaigns, but rather to reward brands and corporations that are actually meeting the standards they claim to hold. Further, she goes beyond consumption behavior and embraces a more civic identity, gathering information from and participating in a variety of organizations that are active in holding corporations accountable to their claims.

The Socially Conscious Consumer may uncover relevant information (online, in this case) about social responsibility. However, as a Critical Citizen-Consumer, she does not take these corporate messages at face value and can actively monitor corporate action and even join likeminded others intent on keeping global giants in check. As Bennett (2003b) notes, the younger generation that is abandoning traditional politics is forming a “global citizen movement”, intent on holding various organizations accountable or spreading a relevant message. The Critical Citizen Consumer, for example, extends the concept of

self-education by understanding differences between types of eco labels, or by more readily distinguishing corporations that adhere to corporate citizenship, such as companies that strive to better their actual working practices through fair trade or environmentally friendly production.

Friends of the Earth³ is a network of environmental organizations present in 71 countries. They focus on environmental issues and conduct campaigns around issues such as climate change and biodiversity, and extend from grass-roots organization to national-based pressure groups. They also provide free National Curriculum-based teaching resources that target young people and are also active in youth clubs. Campaigns reflect national concerns, such as a current push to pressure British MPs to enact a tougher Climate Bill, as well as issues on an international scale.

Friends of the Earth could arguably be considered a broader example of online engagement, but their focus on corporate social responsibility makes them relevant here. The website states that they are “making life better for people by inspiring solutions to environmental problems”, and they provide a great deal of information in reference to their various campaigns. In their “Corporates” section, they state:

The balance of power has shifted. Governments are losing control to huge multinational corporations. This process is putting basic human rights and vast areas of the natural world in serious danger. It's time to challenge the rise of corporate power.

They suggest that although some corporations voluntarily participate in Corporate Social Responsibility, they still need more pressure (i.e., through legislation or citizen protest) to actually change business practices. They propose the following actions:

- Persuade governments to make new rules to control companies.
- Expose corporate lobbying relationships.
- Give affected communities a voice to tell their stories of corporate abuse.

With a focus on corporations such as Shell, they provide detailed background information, video, and media links, and provide information about other concerned partners specifically focused on this issue.

Websites like this give the Critical Citizen-Consumer the ability to monitor the actions of corporations and interact with like-minded others all over the globe. Allowing visitors to submit relevant information results in a larger knowledge base for all participants. This organization addresses citizens as concerned members of a collective group: They are provided with information and engagement opportunities that show them how to participate in traditional political institutions through issue-based activism – in this case, the environment – and political consumerism, which here translates to an awareness of actual corporate social responsibility practices. The network capabilities of

such organizations are strengthened through ICT use, as is the case for other network-driven groups, as described in the next section.

3) The Anti-Consumer

The Anti-Consumer, in principle, rejects consumerist culture. Rather than operate within the market system, she actively works to exclude the role of corporations or damage their image. Her actions could range from avoiding consumption where, rather than supporting socially conscious products, she periodically abstains from purchasing anything at all as a comment on consumer culture (e.g., participating in movements such as Buy Nothing Day⁴), to protest directed at corporate images and individuals. National governments are largely ignored as the Anti-Consumer sees the role they can play as minimal or even nonexistent. She also recognizes that corporate advertising has control over cultural spaces and works to challenge and undermine this. Online, she can hold the Anti-Consumer identity by using the internet to follow aims such as organizing and participating in global protest designed to endorse a rejection of the corporate world, or engaging in hacktivism or culture jamming.

Some extreme examples of the Anti-Consumer exist online, such as hacktivism campaigns or organization of aggressive forms of protest, and also individuals and groups that advocate for a removal from mainstream consumer culture. An example is Adbusters⁵, an organization that describes itself in the following way on its website:

We are a global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs who want to advance the new social activist movement of the information age. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century.

Adbusters takes the notion of corporate pressure one step further. Supporting self-proclaimed holidays such as Buy Nothing Day or TV Turnoff Week, they encourage the Anti-Consumer to (temporarily, anyway) purge her life of consumer-driven activities. Adbusters was the first to promote culture jamming, the act of deliberately altering existing media sources in order to change the dominant brand message. On the website, Adbusters provides examples of the culture jamming of major ad campaigns for well-known brands. They also publish relevant photographs of billboards and advertisements sent in by others. The website allows interested visitors to join their network, submit articles to their offline magazine, and join local JammerGroups. Adbusters sees the Anti-Consumer as again part of a group, where knowledge building leads to engagement opportunities, and where action is best carried out as a collective.

Ironically, perhaps, the Adbusters website contains a "Culture Shop" where visitors can purchase items such as a Media Empowerment Kit, calendars, videos, and flags, and the anti-brand Blackspot shoe. Although they consider themselves anti-capitalist, Adbusters has been criticized for promoting the same

brand of individuality as corporate brands, thus making it just as much a part of consumer society as the society it tries to reject. Despite – or because of – its potentially more mainstream status compared to less visible anti-consumer networks, Adbusters helps to connect others on a global scale and promotes relatively well-known worldwide events like the aforementioned Buy Nothing Day. Here, the Anti-Consumer can connect locally or globally with others to talk about and act upon her anti-corporate sentiment.

Aspects of citizenship can be found within all three of these identities. The differences lie in the level of critical awareness necessary to act – or react against – consumerist culture, the willingness (or not) to work within the system, and acceptance (or not) from democratic society as participating in encouraged forms of citizenship. Some hesitate to endorse anti-consumerist attitudes, noting the widespread prevalence of consumption behavior (Cohen 2003). Others have found that such attitudes are important in predicting activism. For example, West and Larue (2005) find that one of the best predictors of anti-GM (genetically-modified food) activism was anti-corporate sentiment, among others.

Discussion

This chapter has presented a multi-faceted exploration of the citizen-consumer. This area of research is relevant to the current political climate particularly in relation to youth; some go “so far as to consider consumers the primary agents of democracy in the world today” in analyzing “how citizens, and particularly young people, attempt to balance promotion of their personal identity and lifestyle thorough consumer choice with their commitment to global ethical issues” (Micheletti 2003: xiii, citing Beck 2000; Nava 1991; Miller 1995). This preliminary typology of identities has been accompanied by examples of websites that demonstrate various ways of passively or actively seeking information about corporate social responsibility or providing opportunities for engagement in consumer or anti-consumer issues. The discussion here centers on the potential evolution of this citizen-consumer typology. As noted, the typology is an initial formulation and is in the process of being substantiated with empirical research (Ward 2008). Several issues can be raised in an attempt to – through future research – strengthen its robustness: Can each of these identities really be considered “political”, or demonstrating citizen behavior? How do the various websites differ in their mode of address to visitors? How salient is each group within the broader population? What kind of democracy is being promoted within each identity?

First, the discussion returns to the issue of whether – and how – to consider socially conscious consumption as “political”. It has been argued that the marketing of corporate brands as ethical is nothing more than a sophisticated advertising ploy. Why bother with environmental accountability, fair trade, and proper working conditions if the only result is lower profits? Corpora-

tions are extremely sophisticated in how they market their products. They see the need to address the consumer as a citizen if they want to maintain profit; this of course leaves room for false claims. It is important to recognize that, while tying the notion of consumer to the notion of citizen, there is nothing democratic about the corporation. However, if Socially Conscious Consumers believe that their action results in corporate behavior changing for the better, then arguably this is where such consumption becomes citizen-related behavior. Although research is beginning to explore this connection (see e.g., Keum *et al.* 2006; Shah *et al.* 2007) more work is necessary to understand the relationship between consumption and citizenship. Is the citizen-consumer more likely to vote or be perceived as apathetic? Is she more inclined to be political, or is she disillusioned with the whole system?

Differences in mode of address are also present within the typology. To begin, the identities are currently divided according to corporate-driven versus grassroots, issue-based campaigns (type two and three reflecting the latter). Within such a division, the corporate messages are more uniform (i.e., in promoting their claims to social responsibility, they encourage buying behavior). For corporations such as The Body Shop, the bottom line is profit, so they address their visitors as single surfers, as individuals who are personally responsible for their consumption choices. Within the other two examples there is more of a distinction between Critical Citizen Consumer organizations and those that promote Anti-Consumer goals. Although both address their audience as “we”, one encourages work within the system, while the other only accepts action that operates outside consumer culture. These organizations shift between protest, boycotts, supporting legislation, and information sharing. Issues of individual versus collective address also give the impression that websites that vary on this dimension may be attracting entirely different types of people.

Beyond differences in mode of address, there is also the issue of how widespread each identity really is within the notion of citizen-consumer. The most apparent example arises with the Anti-Consumer. With the relatively higher number of corporate websites and more traditional citizen-consumer-related websites such as Friends of the Earth, the Anti-Consumer appears to be less prevalent online and even offline. Or is it a growing reaction to a rapidly globalizing world? It is however possible that with more visibility and popularity, Anti-Consumer groups may lose the very essence of their counter culture identity. This would explain the scorn among die-hards towards more “mainstream” networks like Adbusters. Further, the Anti-Consumers may not provide a viable alternative. Heath and Potter (2004) argue that the counter-culture movement has instead promoted consumption, questioning whether such an identity truly is a critique of (even socially conscious) consumer society.

Finally, what type of democracy is promoted within each element of the typology? It is interesting to note that in the first and third online examples there is no mention of “traditional” nation-state politics. Other than a brief mention of a UN-directed report, The Body Shop website does not discuss legislative ties to their various campaigns. Further, corporations will continue

to focus their efforts and their investment in consumer-rich geographic locals. Even if, theoretically speaking, the Socially Conscious Consumer is given credit for using her spending power wisely and demanding better working conditions in the developing world, for example, the equality of each and every citizen is deeply shaken when one-person-one-vote becomes one-dollar-one vote.

Adbusters maintains a network distinct from conventional political arenas; in fact, some of the actions they promote are considered illegal. Although this may not always be the case on other corporate or anti-corporate websites, perhaps this gives weight to the argument that the way to citizenship is still intertwined with more established forms of engagement. The Critical Citizen-Consumer, when active in organizations like Friends of the Earth, makes this connection possible.

Democracy is becoming less about political parties, voting and traditional political knowledge, perhaps even to some degree leaving the nation-state behind. At the same time, although new forms of citizenship like the citizen-consumer are important, they do not replace old forms of participation or make political institutions irrelevant (Dahlgren 2003). The citizen-consumer operates as a fresh look at democracy, but it can be argued that within these new forms of citizenship one must also find a way to work within the existing political system. Here, it seems that Friends of the Earth takes on an intermediary role, linking the Critical Citizen-Consumer to other forms of political consumerism. The power of collective action to change a corporation's policies – as opposed to government policies – is not engagement directed at the state, but can possibly translate into participants also becoming more powerful citizens within government arenas. Research must continue to examine the relationship between various citizen-consumer identities as well as the connection with traditional political behavior.

On a more methodological level, more exploration is necessary as to how websites can be properly categorized when using this typology. This chapter has attempted to distinguish these categories based on varying types of directed knowledge, attitudes or behavior present in each. In order to make this typology more robust, specific perimeters must be laid out in categorizing relevant online content. Such online research poses several opportunities and shortcomings. For example, a broader website content analysis such as an in-depth, qualitative analyses of online environments could further shed light on distinctions relevant to each citizen-consumer identity, and may increase understanding of these online sources of collective action. Additionally, interviews with individuals at relevant organizations may help to better understand the organizations' philosophies.

Further, as noted in recent research on youth political websites (Ward 2005), simply examining content does not provide indications that the website is being used by the intended audience in the intended manner or with the intended effect. This chapter includes comparably more popular corporate websites that fall outside the scope of activist websites and are not necessarily political in

their outreach. Thus, visitors with an aversion to the political but interested in seeking information about responsible corporate behavior (or those that simply have an interest in the products themselves) may potentially be more likely to visit. It is however difficult to make these claims without actual user data to support how visitors use these websites. The importance of the user perspective remains: It is vital to understand whether youth embrace these websites and why, as well as how these websites actually contribute to their understanding of and attitudes towards their role as Socially Conscious Consumers, Critical Citizen-Consumers, or Anti-Consumers.

Notes

1. Each website described here, though not exclusively geared toward a youth audience, does count young people as an important part of their outreach. The websites were primarily chosen for their relevance within the current typology.
2. Located at: <http://www.uk.thebodyshop.com/> (Consulted on February 17, 2007).
3. Located at: <http://www.foe.co.uk/> (Consulted on February 17, 2007).
4. For more information: <http://adbusters.org/metasc/eco/bnd/>.
5. Located at: <http://www.adbusters.org/home/> (Consulted on February 18, 2007).

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Chapter 3

The Reception of the “Producers” Films on a Participatory Website

*Ordinary Young People and the Politics of Banality*¹

Nico Carpentier

Participation is a complex and contested notion, covering a wide variety of meanings, and used by a variety of people in a diversity of contexts. Mediated communication is one of these contexts where a participatory potential has been established, both at the level of micro-participation, allowing citizens to be active in one of the many (micro-) spheres relevant to everyday life and to put their right to communicate into practice, and at the level of macro-participation, allowing for extensive participation in public debates and for self-representation in public spaces. Throughout the theoretical history of the media-democracy relationship, we have witnessed the reoccurring hope that media products, organisations and technologies (ranging from print to web 2.0) would be capable of increasing the levels of participation and democracy.

These high hopes often ignore two vital contexts. First, there is the political-ideological context, as the meanings attributed to the notion of participation are inherently part of a societal struggle and constituted by ideological processes. The consequence of this line of thought is that the meanings attributed to participation – some more dominant than others – are neither neutral nor accidents of history, but embedded within the present-day epistemologies of the political-democratic. The second context is the structural organisation of mediated communication, which refers to the capitalist economies in which media organisations are embedded, but also to their professional cultures and identities that structure the practices of media organisations, media professionals, and audiences, however active and participatory the latter might be. Both contexts are vital as they (over)determine and often limit the opportunities and capacities of media to organise and facilitate participatory processes.

This article aims to focus on one specific component of these two contexts, questioning how professional and non-professional identities relate to each other and how this relationship is structured through discourses on quality and everyday life, in the reception of a set of nine “amateur” films produced by ordinary youngsters for a North Belgian online platform called 16plus.be. Through this reception study of online content, I will show how the discursive context of participatory processes and products strongly affects their evalu-

ation by their audiences. However these audience members may appreciate the pedagogical, pleasurable, democratic and empowering dimension of these films, combined with a critical stance towards mainstream media professionalism, they at the same time revert to discourses of (a lack of) quality and (the irrelevance of) everyday life, which eventually results in the dismissal of the nine films as banal.

Participatory Histories and Problems

When talking about mediated communication and its participatory potential (which includes web 2.0), we need to go back a long time in history (see e.g. Ostertag 2006). For instance the start-up phase of radio was also characterised by many examples of non-professional broadcasting. Not surprisingly, it was Bertolt Brecht's radio theory (see Marc Silberman's collection of essays by Brecht [2001]) that provided the foundations for the dream of the transformation of radio from a tool of distribution into a tool of communication. But especially from the 1990s onwards – and in some cases earlier, as for instance in the case of Hakim Bey's *TAZ* (1985) – the focus of theoreticians of participation shifted toward the so-called new media. The development of the internet, and especially the web, would not only render most information available to all but would also create a whole new world of communication, within its slipstream the promise of a structural increase of the level of (media) participation. Meanwhile, this dream seems to have come true, at least at first sight: while at first people still had to make the effort to construct their own web pages, the web 2.0 technologies now provide popular² and accessible ways to publish texts, images, and audiovisual material.

The dream is nevertheless far from perfect, as these evolutions are accompanied by a number of substantial problems, which are partially related to the discourse of novelty that still accompanies the new media "revolution". We focus our attention on the participatory potential of new media, which leads us to ignore the capacities of old media. Suddenly newspaper, radio, and television appear to be media from the past century, not relevant enough to incorporate into debates on participation. This causes a number of crucial reductions, disregarding the context of structural organisation of mediated communication and to the political-ideological context.

Firstly, at the structural level, the importance of the old media becomes underestimated. These "old" media still play an important role in the everyday lives of many people. Blinded by the futurist megalomania, and by the hope for a better future, the presence of the old media is often taken for granted or ignored, and the new media's existence is privileged. Here, the discourse of novelty feeds into the technological-determinist model, assuming that specific media technologies are per definition more participatory than others. Without wanting to underestimate the specificity of technologies, or without positioning them as "determined technologies" (Williams 1974: 7), the participatory

potential of media technologies remains dependent upon the way they are used. In practice, this also means that web 2.0 technologies (just like any other technology) can be perfectly used in a top-down non-participatory way.

Secondly, also at the structural level, the institutional nature of the present-day media worlds is equally often ignored. A vast number of media products are still produced by media companies, which are old top-down systems based on capitalist logics and not always in favour of the more maximalist approaches towards participation and democracy. In this dazzling techno-optimism, we often forget that the routines, identities, practices, convictions and representations that circulate in the old media system have not been lost and still co-structure the new media system. The existence of YouTube, with Google as its owner, is a case in point here. The discourse of novelty tends to detach the new media from these capitalist and consumerist realities, ignoring the combination of top-down business processes with bottom-up consumption and production processes that characterise our *Convergence Culture* (Jenkins 2006), which for instance turns our leisure time into (free) labour (Terranova 2000). These political-economic processes also affect the participatory process, as the locus of control of many of the interfaces that facilitate and structure these participatory processes remains firmly in the hands of companies that are outside the participatory process.

This detachment of the use of these technologies, and their participatory potential, from their organisational component becomes problematic as it blinds us from the diversity of participatory practices, and from the contextual components that strongly determine the outcome and intensity of these participatory practices. Even in the blogosphere the existence of the individual writer-publisher is a romantic illusion, because the blog-infrastructure is provided by a variety of organisations and companies. As argued before, the nature of these organisations (whether they are companies or not) affects the participatory process. For instance, the differences in membership structure, allowing participants to have a (formal or informal) connection to the organisation (or not), affects their ability to exert control over the framework in which their participatory activity is embedded.

Also the organisations' objectives have a strong impact on the participatory process, as in some cases organisations aim only to provide access, whilst in other cases they focus more on enabling participation. Classic examples of membership-based and participation-oriented organisations are alternative radio stations (often linked to Amarc³) and the so-called IMCs, where Indy-media⁴ is the most famous example. Although in both cases different types of membership and varying degrees of participation exist, we can still distinguish an explicit and valuable link between the participants and the organisation (Carpentier 2007).

A third problem area is (more) located at the political-ideological level, as a number of sometimes restrictive articulations of the "produser" (e.g. Bruns 2007, or the "prosumer" – Toffler 1980) surround the participatory process. To start on an optimistic note: there is clearly an increased diversity of participatory

practices supported by an increased availability of technologies. Blogging, vlogging, webzines, internet radio (and television), podcasting, digital storytelling, and wiki-ing are clear examples of these evolutions. This can be seen as part of a longer evolution of increased audience autonomy. At the theoretical level, already in the 1970s Barthes and others (e.g., Hall with his encoding-decoding model) pointed to the convergence between the producers and receivers of discourses at the level of interpretation. Barthes' (1984) *Image Music Text* contains the seminal essay *The Death of the Author*, which was a metaphor – not to be taken literally – implying that there was no privileged vantage point that fixed the interpretation of a text. Generating meaning was no longer the privilege of the producer of the discourse. But now it is claimed that the Author has died for a second time, as we witness a convergence between the producers and receivers of discourses at the level of the production process. The old Author is no longer solely in control of the production process, as the producer has overcome the rigid separations between both categories.

However, the Author (aka the media professional – at least in the context of this article) is more resistant than it seems. As argued before, media organisations that allow for participation are often companies, keeping structural control firmly into professional hands, often still working with evenly professional staff to facilitate the participatory process. Even in the case when these organisations are not companies, power imbalances often occur at the organisational level. These imbalances are strengthened by organisational cultures, and the used technologies and interfaces, which are geared towards (providing access to) individual participants. Despite the communicative and collaborative capacities of new media technologies, individual users are often not organised (or “just” part of informal networks and communities) which skews the power imbalance even more. Although audiences can be organised (see Matta 1981; 1986), they are often positioned by media organisations, technologies and themselves as aggregated individuals. Moreover, the Author's privileges are also protected by the audiences' lack of resources (e.g. time). Just like the audience cannot be hyperactive in its interpretative capabilities, it often cannot be hyperproductive in its capacity to produce content.

At the same time the Author is also resistant at the cultural-discursive level, as the contemporary subject positions of media professionals and audiences have long histories and might turn out to be more rigid than expected (and desired). As argued elsewhere (Carpentier 2005), media professionals' identities remain embedded within hegemonic discourses on objectivity, neutrality, (psychological) property, responsibility, management, autonomy and expertise. Audience identities, however active they might be, are often juxtaposed to these professional identities, even if media professionals are not directly involved in specific practices or projects, as they then remain symbolically present.

Through this juxtaposition, producers often remain (articulated as) ordinary people and risk becoming constructed as amateurs, who should be empowered to produce authentic material but who are at the same time deemed unprofessional, inexperienced, untrained, tasteless and untalented. They are seen as

people whose work does not bear witness of professional quality standards and whose banal private experiences and opinions hold little value at the societal level except maybe for their mere existence. Even in some cases, as exemplified by Keen's (2007) *The Cult of the Amateur* they become seen as a threat to our (expert) tastes, knowledges and truths. Through dichotomising articulatory processes like these, ordinary people / amateurs are constructed as a homogeneous mass, detached from the cultural and political, and trapped in their authenticity through the politics of banality.

These cultural logics are reductionist and problematic because they ignore the diversity and complexity of ordinary media audiences and participants. Moreover, they tend to place media professionals (as Author) in privileged positions on the basis of the conflation of employment with expertise. Media professionals are rarely seen as being apart from the organisation in which they are often employed (under different statutes). The implicit (and sometimes explicit) exclusion of amateurs from these skills and knowledge on the basis of professional employment is highly questionable. Indeed, one of the defining elements of, for example, the community media movement is precisely the anti-elitist communication rights discourse claiming that journalistic tasks must not (and should not) be taken on exclusively by media professionals. Members of the community – within which such media are active – can also take on this role (Girard 1992; Bailey *et al.* 2007).

The above-discussed problems culminate in an inclination towards the less intensive forms of participation, where the more radical (and intense) meanings of participation become scarce. From this perspective, the definition of participation is one of the many societal fields where a political struggle is waged between the minimalist and the maximalist variations of participation and democracy. When applied to media participation, this participatory-democratic struggle is waged on two fronts. At the level of the democratisation *of* media, as Wasko and Mosco (1992: 7) call this, participation means that citizens can be active in one of many (micro-)spheres relevant to daily life and exert their rights to communicate. But here they are faced with a number limitations that reduce the level and intensity of their participation, often rendering it "mere" access or interaction, sometimes approximating what Verba (1961: 220-221) once called "pseudo-participation". More specifically, the dominance of technology-based approaches, the organisational-commercial context and the still hegemonic subject positions on media professionals and amateurs (and the practices these subject positions enable or disable) all contribute to the softening up of participation.

When looking at the second front – the democratisation *through* the media (Wasko and Mosco 1992: 13) – the struggle is aimed at giving ordinary people access to different public spaces, connecting the semiotic democracy to the more traditional political reality of a representative democracy. Generating these connections between radical-democratic, deliberative-democratic and representative-democratic models remains extremely difficult to put into practice. Both struggles are of course interrelated. Couldry's (2008: 16) analysis

of what he calls the problem of voice – “the offer or invocation of voice by powerful institutions, and its simultaneous withdrawal” – takes this overarching perspective to show that the struggle for democratisation within and beyond the media is far from over.

Audience Reception of a Web 2.0 Project

The problems related to media democracy and participation affect all media technologies, including web 2.0, which is part of a long tradition of participatory media that allow activating audience members and that contribute to the convergence between the producers and audiences of discourses at the level of the production process. This is again not new, witness Berrigan (1979: 8) eloquent summary of community media participation:

[Community media] are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community.

At the same time this conflation of producer and audience is not total, and participatory media products still have audiences that are not involved in the participatory process. Again, we can refer to alternative media studies, where a similar problem has been established: “It is a paradox, however, that so little attention has been dedicated to the user dimension, given that alternative-media activists represent in a sense the most active segment of the so-called ‘active audience’” (Downing 2003: 625). This argument legitimises the need for introducing more reception studies (see e.g. Staiger 2005) into the area of participatory (online) media, focusing on how audiences interpret and evaluate the outcomes of other people’s participatory activities, at the level of content and process. As many web 2.0 applications now feature a combination of text, audio and video, many of the same methodological and analytical principles as developed to study the reception of television can be used in this context.

Given the abundance of choice of available material and the angle of this article, a case study was developed where the material was clearly produced by inexperienced non-professionals, who for the very first time experimented with the participatory opportunities offered to them. In a way, the selected material matched the stereotypical representations of participatory media outcomes. The young authors (with a little “a”) represent the restrictive articulations of the produser, producing videos that do not match the traditional professional quality standards (at all). The perceived banality of their media activities conflict with discourses that highlight the relevance of the participatory process and its outcomes (despite the perceived lack of quality), its democratic, empowering and pedagogical capacities, combined with the pleasure it seemingly generates,

in contrast to the hegemonic discourses of professionalism. At the same time these contradictions and dissonances also show the limits of these participatory processes, and how a combination of a discourse on quality and a discourse on the everyday still cause these outcomes to be judged as banal.

The specific case study is based on the work of nine groups of youngsters, who received a video training at the 7th *Flemish Science Week*⁵ (which took place from 23 to 27 October 2006) as a small project of the Institute for Broadband Technology (IBBT), in collaboration with the North Belgian public broadcasters' (VRT) online platform 16plus.be. This online platform, which started netcasting in March 2006, clearly manifested itself as a local alternative to YouTube or Google Video:

After the 'blogging' (having an internet diary), the 'vlogging' is now on the rise: putting your own video movies on the internet. From now on Flemish youngsters do not have to visit one or another English-language website like video.google.com or youtube.com. They can publish their work for free on a site which is designed especially for them (VRT 2006a – my translation).

Even the yearly report of the VRT mentions that 16plus.be shows that "Flemish alternatives for YouTube can be successful" (VRT 2006b: 51 – my translation). Its success is rather relative, as almost two years after its launch, 16plus.be now stores about 3180 items (count on 15 March 2008). The number of visits is much higher: Nico Verplancke⁶ mentions 120.000 unique visitors in the first seven months of 16plus' existence, although October 2006 (when the nine groups uploaded their Science Week projects) had a very low number of visitors (1027 unique visitors). 16plus.be has nevertheless established its relevance through the collaboration with one of the VRT's radio stations, Studio Brussel, which allowed some of the music produced by 16plus.be participants to be broadcast on radio. Most famously, one of them (Liam Chan) was "discovered" by 16plus.be and Studio Brussel, and offered a contract with EMI.

On this website, mostly dominated by music, nine video films were posted by the 30 participants of the video training seminar at the 7th *Flemish Science Week*. The names of these nine films, which range in length from 2 minutes 31 seconds to 12 minutes 12 seconds, are: *Ways of Eating*, *The Shopping Ladies*, *Drinking*, *Multicultural Ledeberg*⁷, *The Commandments of Nonsense*, *Buttocks in Belgium*, *Colourful Ledeberg*, *Fashion*, and *Everyday Life in Ghent*. The format used in these films is fairly similar and based on a collage of interviews on the streets and in shops with a diversity of people, sometimes simply refusing to be interviewed, in other cases patiently answering questions like: "Imagine that next year, New Year's Day would be on a Friday, and even on Friday the 13th?" (a question on superstition in *The Commandments of Nonsense*). The sound of the films is in many cases rather difficult to understand, and in at least one case (*Fashion*) the raindrops on the lens of the camera are clearly visible. The films do not always have an introduction, or a clear storyline, and the relationships between the different parts are not always explained.

As the titles indicate, the content of all nine films is very much focused on everyday life. The films allow the viewer to look at the “normal” scenes of everyday life, without adding a layer of aesthetisation or narrative structure, which happens often in the more professional media products. Instead we get to see the raw data of everyday, without much decoration. We see the camera wander from conversation to conversation, being engaged in the everyday chit-chat, shying away from the spectacular, talking about the small things in life (as many people often do⁸). In this sense, the cameras become little flâneurs that observe (with some distance and detachment) what de Certeau (1984) called the discreteness or the singularities of everyday life⁹.

The nine films offer us a series of perspectives on these everyday life structures, its habits and repetitions embedded in culture, but they do not add much narrative structures to these everyday life structures. Arguably (and without disregarding the importance of conversations narrations and myths for everyday life), everyday life as such can hardly be restricted to the narrative. We can find support for this position in de Certeau’s (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, as he writes in this book that “‘stories’ provide the decorative container of a *narrativity* for everyday practices. To be sure, they describe only fragments of these practices. They are no more than its metaphors” (de Certeau 1984: 70 – emphasis in original). Not only is a large part of the practices of everyday life constituted by non-discursive ways of operating like walking, dwelling and cooking (de Certeau 1984: xix), these practices of everyday life also resist (discursive) representation, as they are characterised by a mobility that “adjusts them to a diversity of objectives and ‘coups,’ without their being dependant on a verbal elucidation” (de Certeau 1984: 45).

Apart from the issues of the (de)narrativisation of everyday life, these films are also modest attempts to address the politisation of everyday life. Especially if we use the maximalist model of participation and democracy, we unavoidably end up with a broad approach towards the political (Mouffe 1997: 3). Hidden within the de-narrated representations of everyday life, we can find the very subtle presence of a number of political-ideological dimensions in the nine films, which show the political nature of the everyday. The films deal with the multicultural society and its linguistic diversity, with the resistance towards the consumerism embedded within the fashion industry, with the sexual politics of preservatives and with the popular resistance against non-sexist attitudes (through the telling of jokes), but also with the Foucauldian micro-politics of the university, where not only students (are invited to) talk about their drinking, but also a Ghent professor¹⁰ is being interviewed, resulting in the following interview:

Professor: I’m not sure if it is true that they [the students] drink this much. Actually, I wouldn’t exaggerate it.

Interviewer: And in the days you were a student, was it like that as well?

Professor: It happened that I ... yes ... went over the line, yes. (Drinking)

In order to study the reception of the nine films, and how the banality of these films both at the level of content and form is received, and the contradictions these readings entail, 15 focus group discussions¹¹ were organised and analysed using discourse-theoretical analysis (Carpentier & De Cleen 2007), as part of a larger project on the reception of a diversity of audiovisual programmes and websites. In each of the focus groups, two or three of the nine films were screened, and then discussed by a total of 131 respondents whose discussions were on each occasion moderated by a primary and a secondary moderator.¹² Internal homogeneity was based on educational level and age, while an equal distribution (across the focus groups) on the basis of sex and region was implemented.¹³ The following table gives an overview of the four clusters of focus group discussions, where in each of the clusters (except cluster three) four focus groups were organised based on an young/old and lower education/higher education matrix.

Cluster 1 (FG1-4)				Cluster 2 (FG5-8)				Cluster 3 (FG9-11)			Cluster 4 (FG12-15)			
Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	Y/L	Y/H	O/L	O/H
Everyday Life in Ghent				The Shopping Ladies				Ways of Eating			The Commandments of Nonsense			
Multicultural Ledeberg				Colourful Ledeberg				Drinking			Buttocks in Belgium			
The Commandments of Nonsense				Fashion										

The Banal, the Banal...

The focus group respondents argue extensively and continuously why they dislike the nine films, and explicitly use the concept of the banal in a (limited) number of cases. For instance, Yvette (F, 60, H, FG3¹⁴) summarises her critique on the interviewing as follows: "there was actually no single important question. These are all banal things. They are banal things." Watching the films sometimes provokes crude reactions, as exemplified by the statement of Alain (M, 52, H, FG7): "The main advantage of these films is that they are short." Some even doubt the authenticity of the films: "They are so amateurish. I even got the impression that they did that on purpose, it was so much beyond ... That's my impression" (Danielle, F, 50, H, FG7). The negative evaluation of the focus group respondents and their discourses of banality focus on three component of the films: the level of the content, the reasons for making the films, and (especially) the formal qualities of the nine films.

At the level of the content of the films (focussing on everyday life), the respondents point to the lack of relevance and usefulness. Shari (F, 17, H, FG2) for instance says: "yeah, I really don't understand what the use is." The lack of relevance is explained by the low educational and informational level of

the films that the respondents were screened, as can be seen in the (again ironic) fragment of one of the focus group discussions.

Hendrik (M, 20, L, FG1): It wasn't that educational. I didn't really learn something from it, I think.

Jan (M, 17, L, FG1): Well, I do know a new joke now.

Dries (M, 17, L, FG1): Yes, maybe so.

Joran (M, 18, L, FG1): Which one? I've already forgotten it.

Similarly, the focus of the films on everyday life provokes comparisons with holiday pictures which firmly positions these films in the realm of the private, and can again be considered symptomatic for the perceived low social utility of the films.

The second component for critiquing the films is based on the (perceived) motives attributed to the producers. Here the banality of the films is argued on the basis of the producers being bored and having nothing else to do, or their ambition to make themselves noticed, as is illustrated by Dries (M, 17, L, FG1): "These are people who want to be noticed and put something on the internet." The killing time argument is used by Anneke (F, 34, H, FG2), when she says: "It's difficult to have an opinion about it, because there is really no contribution. There was nothing in it, there was no content. There was ... it was just killing time."

The formal quality of the films is the third component that attracts fierce critiques from the respondents. The respondents not only argue that there are no real topics or content, or that the topics are treated in a superficial way. At the same time they formulate a lethal avalanche of formal critiques. The films are described as poorly filmed (with the rain drops on the lens mentioned frequently), the framing and editing are seen as problematic, and the sound quality is poor. In general, there is a lack of aesthetic quality. The respondents also refer to the lack of narrative structure and focus, and to the poor preparation and research of the producers ("They are just improvising" (An, F, 23, H, FG6)). This is strengthened even more by the critiques on the usage of dialects and the sloppy clothes of the producers. It brings one of the respondents to the conclusion that they are not even trying: "But it is apparently not even their ambition to deliver something good, because they are not doing their best" (Dorien, F, 21, L, FG1).

On many occasions, the perceived lack of aesthetic, narrative and technical quality is juxtaposed to the quality of professional media productions. Here, media professionals act as a constitutive outside which provides the discursive framework to criticise the amateur productions. Max (M, 20, L, FG10) for instance describes what would be necessary to improve the quality of the films: "Everything [needs to change]. The sound and the images ... It needs to be recorded by a decent camera, and the sound should be recorded by a sound engineer, and the editing should be done by an editor. Somebody specialised."

Looking for Relevance

Despite the unanimous critiques on the formal and content-related qualities of the nine films that support and strengthen the discourse of banality, a number of discourses emerge that legitimise the existence of the films. However banal the films are perceived to be, the respondents quickly agree to the democratic right of ordinary producers to create and publish films like these. They also point to the importance of the learning process for the producers, and to the pleasure it generates (for the producers – not necessarily for their audiences). These legitimising discourses of the banal again use the professional media as a constitutive outside, but this time critiquing the mainstream media as manipulated and unreal(istic).

The discourses of pedagogy and pleasure are reasonably straightforward legitimisations of the films. On the one hand the respondents refer to the learning process and the ability of the producers to improve their skills (as part of a learning-by-doing process, or through the feedback they receive). As Fabio (M, 26, H, FG6) puts it: "Who knows, they might put together a perfect one and a half hour film in 10 years time." The respondents also speculate about the possibility of these films being the result of a school assignment, and a more institutionalised learning process. Interestingly, some of the older focus group respondents refer to their own learning process as "film amateurs" (using 8 millimetre cameras).

On the other hand, the respondents point to the pleasure that the producers derive from making these films, and the ability of the producers to be creative. Jos (M, 49, H, FG7) formulates this as follows: "The question also is whether we should always strive for the high arts ... My first impression also was: they are just messing about, but these people have actually been quite creative. They weren't just consuming, they were having fun." Another element of this discourse is the pleasure generated by showing these films to your own social networks. Especially the focus groups with elderly respondents add a layer of otherness to this discourse, as they point to the generational differences and the specificity of youth culture. These respondents accept the pleasure that these young derive from making these films, but simultaneously define it as strange to their own life words.

Apart from the discourses of pedagogy and pleasure, the respondents refer to a discourse of democracy, freedom and empowerment to legitimise the existence of these films. The producers are deemed to be free to exert their democratic right to publish the material, and an infringement on that right is often immediately depicted as censorship and rejected. On some occasions the respondents link the perceived poor quality to a social hierarchy, but even then they grant the producers their communication rights: "I thought I needed some time to think about what I actually thought about this. Normally I am more in favour of keeping the plebs away from society, but that's actually wrong. I've had the opportunity to reflect about whether they had the right or not. They do have the right" (Natalia, F, 36, H, FG15).

The democratic rights discourse is combined with an emphasis on ordinary people, as these films are seen as ways to provide media access to ordinary people for both the youngsters who produced the films, as for the people who featured in them. Despite the debates caused by the complexities of the concept “ordinary people” the respondents point to the authenticity and spontaneity of the films, which in turn is seen as a way to “really” represent reality. The access of ordinary people to the media then becomes a privileged way to achieve a realist portrayal of everyday life, as is summarised by Jos (M, 49, H, FG7): “but I also think that ... at the beginning it looks like nothing, but now, by talking and thinking about it ... it is a very realist image.”

The discourses of pedagogy, pleasure and democracy are complemented by a fourth discourse that legitimises the existence of these films by reverting to the outside identity of media professionals and mainstream media organisations. In contrast to the professional quality argument discussed above (which discredits amateur producers), the discourse of professionalisation is a critique launched at media professionals and mainstream media organisations, through which the nine films gain importance and legitimacy. Eva’s (F, 25, H, FG6) brief remark bears witness of this logic of difference: “It’s just a forum to show things that do not reach us through the television or newspaper ...” The nine films are not only deemed different but also more real and authentic because they are subjective (whilst professional journalists are seen as having to be neutral), because the ordinary people featured in the films gain unmediated access, without “being put words in their mouths” by “professional journalists” (Tiny, F, 83, L, FG11), and because they are not part of a commercialised media system focused on the spectacular, which is fiercely critiqued in the focus groups. Through these differences, the authenticity and realism of the non-professional films becomes valued. In the professional media system, ordinary people are seen as victims of media professionals: “Even if they show ordinary people in the media, on television, they can do with them what they want to” (Muriel, 17, F, L, FG5). Support for these kinds of professional media critiques is provided by the respondents’ own experiences: “My sister appeared on television once, and they first told her what she should say” (Jeannine, F, 62, H, FG8). In contrast to this management of ordinary people within the professional media system, the nine films allowed the participants to speak freely, as is illustrated by Jacques’ (M, 60, H, FG3) statement: “I didn’t see any of the interviews being interrupted, so they could say what they wanted.”

The Politics of Banality Versus the Discourse of Political-democratic Relevance

The two sets of discourses discussed above are clearly dissonant, and their confrontation shows the limits of these participatory processes, as perceived by the respondents. Clearly, there is a strong emphasis on what can be described as professionally defined quality: merely showing the structures of

everyday life, without adding a narrative structure and aesthetic dimension to it seems extremely difficult for the respondents to accept. On the other hand the democratic rights discourse and the anti-professionalisation discourse are evenly strong supported by the respondents. In order to solve this dissonance, the respondents revert to different strategies to deal with this tension.

A first (but rare) strategy consists of the explicit rejection of amateur filmmaking at all, and to celebrate professional filmmaking. For instance Piet (M, 20, L, FG10) complains about the disrespect for (or even loss of) professionalism: "people think that because they have a microphone that they can interview, and that they are professionals. Which is very much in contrast with the films [we've seen]." These kinds of reactions are related to the distrust that is sometimes ventilated towards the young producers, as their "professional" ethics are dubious. Respondents here claim that they would not like to be interviewed by the producers, as "you can never know, maybe they just want to play a prank on you. If they would ask me [to be interviewed] I would simply continue walking" (Youssef, M, 18, L, FG5). On other occasions the respondents question the procedures to gain the permission of the films' participants, thus "violating their privacy" (An, F, 34, H, FG2).

The respondents also use other strategies to deal with the dissonance between the different discursive positions. One other strategy is to complement producer freedom by viewer freedom; to use Nick's (M, 20, L, FG10) words: you're not obliged to watch these films as "the internet is big enough for everybody". A third strategy is to point to the diversity within the category of the amateur filmmakers, and contrasting the work of the nine films' producers with other more "professional amateurs". For instance Karel (M, 78, H, F15 – respondent's emphasis) speaks about a friend of his: "I have a friend that makes films. He is a member of a film club and produces films. If you see how much time needs to be invested to make something that even remotely looks like a film, even if it is about a banal topic, like scouting or so..." A fourth strategy is the suspension of judgement, where it is deemed impossible to judge the quality of a film, as "time or the audience should tell". Marc's (M, 53, H, FG7) argument continues: "at his time Van Gogh was also flattened to the ground, and punk wasn't music when it started." This strategy is related to the fifth strategy, which consists of pleading for the development of (self-)regulatory systems for quality control (e.g. quality labels). As even these (self-)regulatory systems conflict with the notion of production freedom and the anti-censorship position of the respondents, they do very much struggle to reconcile both positions (as the following discussion illustrates). These difficulties increase even more as respondents are only willing to accept "censoring" interventions in cases of illegality and abuse; in other cases they find themselves in a deadlock.

Ironically, all five strategies discussed above recognise (in varying degrees) the importance of these professional quality standards. Even when they reject the professionalisation of media content, and value the democratic access and participation of ordinary people, their work is still judged by professional production standards, unavoidably rendering these youngsters' work banal and

preventing them access to the signifier of the Author. Moreover, the public broadcaster VRT, traditionally linked to these professional quality standards, is scolded by most respondents for wasting their tax money by supporting the 16plus.be website.

A second dissonance is related to the quality-debate and the hegemony of professional quality standards. The films (attempt to) offer us a different perspective on everyday life, and address the political dimension of everyday life, but in the focus group discussions, participants only rarely talk about the content of the nine films at all. Only in a few occasions they seem to be able to decode the meanings that the young producers have attempted to encode. It is the perceived lack of narrative and aesthetic quality that becomes the dominant issue in the focus group discussions, which blinds the respondents for the content of the films, and their attempts to show the political nature of the political.

The main argument that is used to reject the content of these films is exactly its perceived lack of relevance. As mentioned above, the lack of relevance is linked by the respondents to the general “quality problem” of the films. Here Fabio’s (M, 26, H, FG6) words illustrate this rejection on the basis of the lack of relevance: “Including real social problems in these films – problems that matter to youngsters at this moment – that would be much more important than talking nonsense about shopping ladies.” This example shows how the producers become trapped in another level of the discourse of banality, which does not deal this much with the perceived poor formal qualities of the films, but with the banality (and lack of relevance) attributed to everyday life itself.

These perspectives contrast strongly with Lefebvre’s attempts to emphasise the critical-political potential of the everyday, which is seen as the “lived experience [le vécu] elevated to the status of a concept and to language. And this is not done to accept it but, on the contrary, to change it” (Lefebvre 1988: 86); these perspectives also contrast with the film producers’ (probably not so conscious and definitely not very obvious) attempts to represent (at least some of) these political dimensions. Despite the discourse on democracy and empowerment, and the anti-professionalisation discourse, which both celebrate the producer, we can see how the interlocking politics of banality, through the continued references to professional quality (rendering amateur films banal) and through the disavowal of the everyday as banal, frame and dislocate the participatory process.

Conclusion

The advent of web 2.0 has generated another wave of celebrative discourses on the realisation of media technologies’ democratic potentials. Of course, studying the 16plus.be online platform, it is rather difficult to deny that these 30 youngsters are provided with a platform on which they can publish their work, and make it accessible to the outside world. Clearly, this is an example of a participatory process facilitated by media technology, and even supported

and facilitated by human intervention (at the level of making the material available and providing them with a basic training), which is not always the case. The focus group respondents recognise and appreciate this participatory dimension, witness the pedagogical, pleasurable, democratic and empowering discourses used by these respondents.

But at the same time it is difficult to ignore the harsh critiques formulated by the focus group respondents. They do not focus that much on the organised nature of the online platform, as the link with the public broadcaster VRT is not made explicit in the films, but also not on the 16plus.be website. Once the respondents do learn that 16plus.be is a VRT-project, they react very negatively, but not because of the (feared) VRT's impact on the project. The critique of wasting the tax payers' money is intrinsically articulated with their main critiques, which are focussed at the perceived lack of aesthetic, narrative and technical quality, at the irrelevance of representing everyday life as everyday life, and at the irrelevance of everyday life itself.

Through these critiques we can see how hegemonic the professional quality standards are, as they form the backbone of these (formal) critiques. Professional television and its norms, sedimented in the subject position of the professional Author, act as a constitutive outside to evaluate and dismiss the nine films. The respondents value the idea that ordinary people can produce and publish media content, but at the same time when this content conflicts too much with the normalised professional standards, the producers' work becomes perceived as banal. Here quality becomes an argument used against the participatory process, and the possibility of a non-narrative collage of the everyday *as the non-spectacular and mundane everyday* is simply not taken into consideration. Moreover, the topical focus on the everyday, and the hesitant attempts to deal with its political nature, also become discredited through their articulation as irrelevant. This has partially to do with the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday, but also with the decoding problems the non-narrative format has caused. The combination of the perceived banality (or lack of sophistication) of the used audiovisual language, and the topical banality of filming the everyday, has trapped the young producers into a politics of banality, which is virtually impossible to overcome.

The hegemony of professional quality standards does not imply that the mainstream media are celebrated as the only and ultimate model. The respondents also use an anti-professionalisation discourse, where the mainstream media are evenly criticised for their unnecessary neutrality (and lack of subjectivity), their lack of respect for (and even manipulation of) ordinary people, and their commodification and spectacularisation. This generates an interesting paradox, where the mainstream media offer a poor perspective on reality, but master the aesthetic and narrative professional standards, and where these amateur films have little aesthetic and narrative qualities, but offer a more realist perspective on everyday life. It is a paradox that (among many other things) disrupts the participatory process, and continues to impose outside quality criteria on these participatory processes.

In conclusion, I would like to argue that one way to move beyond this paradox can be found in the redefinition of the notion of quality. The paradox tends to remove the attention from one of the main reasons of existence of these participatory media processes, which is to maximise the participatory-democratic imaginary. The notion of quality not only needs to be – at least partially – reclaimed and recaptured by amateurs, following Said's (1994) meaning of amateurism as "an activity that is fueled by care and affection rather than by profit and selfish, narrow specialisation" (Said 1994: 84). If quality is no longer seen as the media professionals' sole property, a respectful dialogue between amateur and professional identities (or even respectful collaborations – see Carpentier 2003) could then enable to acknowledge the hybridity of the concept of quality, opening it up to contain a wide variety of articulations. This re-articulation would need to avoid the reduction of quality to the aesthetic and the narrative structure, but should include the emphasis on the participatory process as an integral component of quality, which is already well-captured by the concept of *democratic quality*. Maybe there is hope for this discursive expansion in Jos' (M, 49, H, FG7) words, when he says: "but I also think that ... at the beginning it looks like nothing, but now, by talking and thinking about it ... it is a very realist image."

Notes

1. The research project is supported by a grant of the FWO (Research Foundation Flanders – www.fwo.be), project number: FWOAL392.
2. The Technorati web site (<http://technorati.com/about/>) was tracking 112.8 million web sites on March 24, 2008.
3. See <http://www.amarc.org/>
4. <http://www.indymedia.org/>
5. <http://www.vlaamsewetenschapsweek.be/>
6. See his powerpoint presentation: *16 Plus. An interactive site for (young) creative people* at http://v1.ibbt.be/archive/ilabWS/ppt/16_plus.pdf.
7. Ledeberg is a small, densely-populated labour-class district of the North Belgian city of Ghent.
8. As Heritage (1984:239) remarked: "The social world is a pervasively conversational one in which an overwhelming proportion of the world's business is conducted through the medium of spoken interaction."
9. It would be careless to claim that the nine films do not refer to a structure, as everyday life is of course highly structured. If we for instance look at Felski's (1999/2000:18) seminal definition of the everyday we can clearly see the importance of structure (as habit and repetition), as everyday life is: "grounded in three key facets: time, space and modality. The temporality of the everyday ... is that of repetition, the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in a sense of home and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit." Relating everyday life to the specific social conditions of daily life under industrial capitalism, Lefebvre (1971) also emphasises the temporal and repetitive characteristics of everyday life.
10. The interviewed "professor" is actually the head of a department secretariat of the Ugent.
11. A 16th focus group discussion was not used in the analysis because of quality problems.
12. I wish to thank Lynn Bernaerts, Leehana Bouchat, Isabel Chairez Alfaro, Annick De Pelsemaeker, Zita De Pooter, Niki Desmaele, Kim Goethals, Elke Lostermans, Sarah Musschebroeck, Southida Phongprasanesak, Bart Suykens, Laura van Eeckhout, Martine Vanaken, Jellina Vanderheijden, Carmel Vandersmissen, and Elvera Weusten for their appreciated help, Wim Hannot for coordinating their efforts, and Jo Pierson for his kind support to the project.

13. The 15 focus groups had the following age distribution: 10-19 years: 29 respondents; 20-29: 37; 30-39: 10; 40-49: 9; 50-59: 13; 60-69: 11; 70-79: 14; 80-89: 8. The respondents had received the following types of education: no degree: 1; lower education: 12; secondary education: 62; higher education: 55 (polytechnic: 17; university: 24; not specified: 14). 61 of the respondents were male, 70 female. They lived in the following North Belgian provinces: Antwerpen: 11; Henegouwen (South Belgium): 1; Limburg: 16 (and Dutch Limburg (Netherlands): 10); Oost-Vlaanderen: 15; Vlaams-Brabant: 46 (and Brussel: 12); West-Vlaanderen: 20. As 16plus.be is not very known, it comes as no surprise that only 18 respondents know the website.
14. The first three codes refer to the sex (Female/Male), age and educational level (High/Low) of the focus group respondents. The FG code refers to the number of the focus group.

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Part II

Policies

Chapter 4

Making Citizens Online

From Virtual Boy Scouts to Activist Networks

Stephen Coleman

Before they can be recognised, understood or addressed, social groups as diverse as women, foreigners, criminals, entrepreneurs, alcoholics or youth must first be imagined. Policy is one way of imagining them – for example, as victims, targets, obstacles, clients, claimants, customers or electors. To become a subject of policy discourse is to be imagined in a specific way; to be conceived as deserving particular forms of treatment – or neglect.

Young people – the social group with which we are concerned here – have long been the subject of policy discourse. Regarded through most of modern history as passing through a “stage of life between childhood and adulthood”. (Freeland 1992), they have tended to be seen, in Qvortrup’s (1990) wry phrase, as human becomings rather than human beings. How young people are imagined determines what policy might be expected to do to, for and with them. And how adulthood is imagined, as an end result of youthful transition, sets normative conditions for the substance of policy. If, for example, young people are characterised as being amoral, apathetic, hedonistic and out of control – a discourse that has persisted for much of the past half century – and if adulthood is imagined as entailing self-discipline, a recognition of civic duty and employability, a range of policies will be devised with a view to preparing the former for the latter. Indeed, this has been a dominant theme of educational policy throughout the past century.

The policy thinking that concerns us in this chapter has to do with ways of shaping the transition from political disenfranchisement and dependence to adult citizenship. Before the age of eighteen (in Britain; older in some other nation states) young people are largely excluded from political citizenship; they are denied the right to vote or stand for election; discouraged from asserting their own political demands; and governed within a range of unaccountable institutions, most notably the family and the school. Instead, they are subjected to various forms of citizenship training, intended to prepare them for the civic responsibilities of adulthood. They are, in this sense, apprentice citizens.

The imagined terms, aspirations and defects of this civic apprenticeship shape the policy imagination, out of which emerges strategies, schemes and regulations

designed to make social reality consistent with “officially expressed intentions” (Lowi & Ginsburg 1996: 607). The policy process entails four main stages: problem definition and framing; determining preferred outcomes; assessing available techniques and technologies that can bring about the desired outcome; and implementation. Each of these stages will be considered here in the context of current British policies for making and nurturing apprentice citizens.

Policy Conjectures

All policy starts with *problem definition*. As Stone (1988: 122) argues, social problems “are not given out there in the world waiting for smart analysts to come along and define them correctly”, but are “created in the minds of citizens by other citizens, leaders, organizations, and government agencies, as an essential part of political maneuvering.” Social problems cannot be defined neutrally or objectively; they are value-laden products of particular configurations of interests, preferences and beliefs. The naming of social categories – “youth today” (often negative)/“the next generation” (more often positive) – and their characterisation – lazy, apathetic, indulgent, creative, caring, altruistic – provide a symbolic framework for thinking about how to deal with them.

Policy problems are often *framed* as narratives, employing metaphors that suggest appropriate readings. Policy narratives about young citizens invoke metaphors of “decline”, “disconnection” and “tuning out”, often supported by quantitative data intended to demonstrate authoritatively the magnitude of a perceived “downward” trend. British policy-makers and commentators often invoke a well-rehearsed narrative of disengagement, which suggests that “connections” which once existed have somehow become detached. For example, in the 2005 British general election only 37 % of eligible 18-24 year-olds voted, representing an alarming 14-point drop from the 1997 election. Few young people belong to political parties any more; in February 2004 8 % of Labour party members and 12 % of Conservative party members were under 35 (the average age of members for each party was 59 and 54 respectively) and the number of young people who say that they care who wins the next election fell from 68 % in 1994 to 39 % in 2003. There has been a ten-year decline in audiences for UK television news, with 16-24 year-olds the least likely to watch news broadcasts or buy newspapers. Falling numbers such as these are central to policy definition because they appear to offer an objective account of pathologies, comparable to doctors pointing to increased blood pressure or a heart that beats too fast.

Defining civic disengagement as the problem suggests an obviously desirable *outcome*: re-engagement. In addressing the perceived problem of young people’s indifference to civic participation, British government policy statements have adopted a strategy designed to reverse an apparently precipitous decline. For example, the Ministerial introduction to a policy statement by the UK Cabinet Office’s Children and Young People’s Unit asserted that:

[W]e must all take the action necessary to raise the levels of youth participation in democracy, and the numbers of young people who use their vote. If we say young people aren't interested in politics and voting, then we must strive to engage their interest.

But what precisely does that mean? What sort of "participation in democracy" do policy-makers want to promote, aside from young people using their votes? Is the aim to engage young people's interests in politics as it is currently conducted and mediated or to devise new ways of doing and communicating politics? Are there areas of political participation that policy-makers would *not* want to promote or even tolerate? By framing policy as a response to decline, the default assumption is that reversing it would be the optimum outcome; that persuading more young people to vote, join and care about political parties and watch the evening news would somehow return political democracy to a state of robust health.

Managed and Autonomous Citizenship

The project of making citizens cannot but be informed by policy-makers' image of what the ideal citizen would look like, care about and do with their time. These normative expectations tend to be implicit; often they are not even acknowledged by actors within the policy process. In the context of young people's civic engagement, two contrasting images of the ideal citizen seem to be in tension with one another. Managed citizens are designed to take their place as responsible members of an established political community. Managed citizenship training takes a number of forms, from educational programmes (civics) intended to acquaint future citizens with the laws, constitutional arrangements and protocols which must be understood if one is to play one's part responsibly. In contrast, policies for autonomous citizenship encourage young people to arrive at their own meanings of community, responsibility and participation. As set out by Bernard Crick's committee which paved the way for the teaching of citizenship in British schools, the aim of liberal citizenship training should be the cultivation of young people who are "individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves". Advocates of autonomous citizenship are critical of pedagogical approaches which seek to inculcate knowledge of existing structures and processes rather than explore ways in which young people can make their presence felt creatively and independently. For example, the final report of the Power Commission (2006: 204-205), which was established to consider why disengagement from formal democratic politics had grown in Britain and how it might be reversed, recommended that a "new approach to political education" should be taken in schools, which would emphasise "why and how citizens might get involved in a range of political activities", relying less upon "abstract discussion" than reflection on "political issues of actual concern to themselves" and "the range of ways they might address those concerns through democratic political activity".

Responding to the liberal anti-foundationalism of the autonomous perspective, the conservative newspaper columnist, Melanie Phillips, in one of her regular laments about contemporary trends, has argued that:

[T]his “active citizenship” is a formula for permanent antagonism to authority and to the state. It derives from the notion that the country has to be remade, and that its identity and constitutional settlement and framework of values have all failed. Instead of binding society together, it threatens finally to fragment it (*Daily Mail*, 29 September 2006).

These competing models of citizenship – managed and autonomous – both claim to offer responses to the same narrative of civic decline and both blame the other for exacerbating the problem. Melanie Phillips’ dutifully-minded citizens, ever-prepared to play their part in the established order, would see the Power Commission’s active democrats as an unruly regiment; Bernard Crick’s “individually confident” activists would see Boy-Scout-style civic dutifulness as little more than uncritical conformism. How such policies unfold in the real world has much to do with the techniques and technologies that are employed to make them happen.

To speak of *technologies* is not to refer simply to hardware, software or circuits of electrical power, but to systems of scientific knowledge that are applied with a view to achieving intended outcomes. In the former, narrow conception, computers, modems, cameras and television masts would count as technologies, but school curricula, legal systems, psychotherapy courses and dictionaries would not. In thinking about technologies as ways of achieving intended outcomes, it becomes clear that policies are themselves technological discourses, i.e. they are ways of thinking and speaking about how to make particular things happen.

In this chapter we are interested in the technological discourse that surrounds the internet – and digital information and communication media in general – as a means of engaging young citizens. There has been much enthusiasm in policy circles for the internet as a technology of “reconnection” – an intriguing metaphor which suggests that something that has come apart needs to be re-attached. For the UK Government, this involves the use of a technocratic adhesive. As it states in its policy paper on e-democracy, the internet “could strengthen participation in representative democracy, particularly among young people” (HMGovernment 2002: 17). The syllogistic foundation for this claim is that:

Evidence suggests that young people are among those least likely to see the democratic process as relevant to them. Young people are also among those most likely to be competent in ICT (HMGovernment 2002: 16).

Before considering how governments have attempted to make this linkage in practice, we should think about the ways in which they have come to see themselves as technological agents and citizens as technical practitioners. In creas-

ingly, in what Barry (2001) refers to as a technological society, governments see their role as being to manage social networks by configuring and intervening in flows of communication. Democracy, as an arrangement for making decisions that reflect the public will, is imagined as a complex circulation of interests and opinions which government has the technical task of aggregating. As technological practitioners, citizens are expected to acquire and update their knowledge and skills in order to perform their social role with appropriate self-confidence, flexibility and risk-awareness. Multi-million-pound policies to promote “digital inclusion” are intended to connect citizens to networks of e-governance, subjecting them to technologies designed to monitor, modify and regulate public space and social behaviour. As employees, consumers and citizens, people come to spend their lives within informatised environments characterised by an acute tension between rhetorics of freedom (more time to surf, greater access to information, broader communication networks) and experiences of systemic constraint (inflexibly routinised labour, proprietorial software, inescapable surveillance.) As governments come to conceive citizens as e-citizens and democracy as e-democracy, these tensions between autonomy and control intensify.

Policies and projects intended to stimulate, uphold and expand youth e-participation are very much in fashion. National and local governments have set up websites inviting young people to comment on their policies. For example, announcing a forum in which young people would be able to question Microsoft chairman, Bill Gates, the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, George Reid, declared that “Reflecting the concerns of today’s young people and making them feel involved as twenty-first century citizens will bring with it unique challenges, but with technology and effort on all sides, we can build a strong democracy for the future and lead by example to other countries as well.” Social movements have come to depend upon new media to make their causes visible. Glen Tarman, one of the coordinators of the Make Poverty History Campaign, has stated that: “We will not make poverty history, secure human rights or protect the global environment without the effective and creative use of new media in our campaigning towards these ends” (Raymond 2006). Senior politicians are going online with a view to convincing young voters that they are in touch with the digital mediaspace. During the 2008 US presidential election campaign candidates vied with one another for Facebook and YouTube dominance and Barack Obama declared that he wanted to be the first President to use online tools to allow young people to participate in policy-making. *Wired* magazine has declared that “Obama owes his victory to the internet” (*Wired* 3 June 2008). Public administrators, working at various levels of government in a range of different countries, are under pressure to devise policies that will attract youth into the orbit of government, politics and active citizenship. In a statement to the House of Commons, the Cabinet Office Minister, Tom Watson, set out the UK Government’s aim of encouraging “civil servants to take the first steps to engage with online social networks”. In response to an MP who suggested that civil servants should be trained to be “not just technically but culturally aware of the needs of young people, who use this medium more and more”, Watson stated that:

There are an incredibly large number of digital pioneers across the civil service – young people who may be junior in status – and one of my jobs is to try to join them all up so that they can enlighten their older counterparts in more senior positions (Hansard, 18 June 2008: col 930).

In all of these cases, policies which start off by promising a new dawn of technologically-enabled accessible, transparent, deliberative, responsive democracy are compromised by the incongruence between the proclaimed desire to enhance citizen autonomy and the political reflex to manage political subjects. Policies for youth e-participation are particularly vulnerable to this conflict of intentions.

Managed e-participation projects have tended to see the internet as a way of connecting young people to institutions that govern them; of providing them with experiences of being heard by politicians; of learning about how government and politics works; and of doing so within safe, responsibly-controlled enclaves dedicated to the nurturing of apprentice citizens. For example, the Headsup website (<http://www.headsup.org.uk/content/>), run by the highly-respected Hansard Society, is funded by the UK Government so that young people can put their views to “the UK’s top decision-makers from parliament and government who want to understand the views and experiences of young Britain.” It is generally used by school students in classrooms, under the supervision of their teachers. The aim of the site is not to connect school students with one another, but to create a vertical message channel between young people and those who rule over them. The communication flow is regulated through the moderation of messages and rules setting out the terms of acceptable message content. As the Headsup site manager explained in an interview:

In the initial stage it wasn’t pre-moderated, which means that all the comments went on straight away. We quickly realised that the young people were very quick to cotton on to that and expose and exploit it and post lots of dodgy messages, so it’s now pre-moderated, but the messages are of a really high quality now [...] I think with any online forum debate you need rules to help govern the participants really... The thing is when you’ve got the rules it’s easier to manage... In my time of managing Headsup which is about nine months now I haven’t had to refer or use any of them or say you’ve broken this rule etc. It’s like a polite deterrent really (Interview with Barry Griffiths, 4 July 2006).

To speak of “high quality” comments, “dodgy messages” and governing “the participants” suggests that technical spaces are infused with value-laden precepts. Even though most people might agree about which messages in an online forum seem to add to the debate and which seem to be irrelevant or offensive, and many regular online communicators would be happy to adhere to explicit rules guiding civilised online behaviour, any particular exercise of managerial control is inescapably shaped by power asymmetries, unjust exclu-

sions and cultural insensitivities. It is at the point when these are acknowledged, transgressed or contested that what might at first seem to be a merely technical space becomes manifestly political.

Autonomous e-participation emerges in spaces that cannot be institutionally managed. Unlike managed e-participation, the communication flow tends to be horizontal, involving peer-to-peer exchanges; rather than being “heard” by politicians, the emphasis is upon taking collective action; rather than learning about government, there is a scepticism towards the democratic claims made by and on behalf of state institutions; and, instead of operating within safely controlled zones, great hope is invested in the porous and expansive nature of the Internet as a capacious network of networks. For example, one of the organisers of the Student Against Sweatshops website made it clear when interviewed that their main intention was to communicate with other students rather than with governments, corporations or university authorities:

There is a recognition by students that sweatshops are a third world issue. It appeals to the students because they also have to work rubbish jobs, long hours for no pay and there has been a big movement, particularly in America, linking up sweatshop work with low pay on campus work and fighting for a living wage for workers and it's starting to take off in UK universities too, which we're hoping to feed into.

Even though governments are keen to promote forms of managed e-participation, online campaigns such as Students Against Sweatshops are unlikely to be offered or to accept government funding:

I'm not sure that for our campaign we would accept that sort of funding. I think if it's a political campaign, regardless if you use the internet or not, there's always the question of how much you can be influenced by taking money of that sort. Ours isn't just a campaign to get people engaged. There's a set of political objectives there.

Each of these policies for e-participation – managerial and autonomous – is open to criticism at the point of *implementation*; the first for controlling, containing and potentially devitalising the civic energies of young people by diverting them into the narrow channels of institutionally-centred politics; the latter for indulging in a form of echo-chamber radicalism most likely to reinforce the values of insiders, be ignored by outsiders and have little impact upon real-world decision-making. Each of these technologies for making citizens seems to lack what the other possesses; one allows young people to address their rulers, but not one another; the other allows them to express common concerns without having access to the means of addressing them. It is as if, in each case, only one half of the policy imagination has been developed. Arriving at a more rounded policy calls for a reconception of youth e-participation, acknowledging the diverse ways in which its central categories might be constructed.

Only by reflecting upon the complex patterns of meaning construction and situational logic that surround policy formation relating to youth e-participation are we likely to be able to explain why and how governments have come to commit energy and resources to particular strategies and projects and not others. And only by critically interpreting competing policy frames within and beyond government can we hope to understand the conflicting interests, expectations and political values which define and becloud aspirations for youth e-participation. Undertaking a critical assessment of this policy area entails consideration of three key questions: Who are “youth” and what makes them different from anyone else? What does it mean to be addressed and to act as a citizen? In what way does the Internet enable forms of social communication compatible with the development of active citizenship?

“Youth’s a Stuff will not Endure”: Passing Phase or Forever Young?

Contemporary discussion of youth is pervaded by metaphors of transition and decline, largely emanating from the Parsonian conception of youth as a period which eases “the difficult process of adjustment from childhood emotional dependency to full ‘maturity’” (Parsons 1942: 30). In seeing it as a period of linear progression to adulthood, youth is naturalised; its cultural dimension is relegated to a secondary status.

In the late twentieth-century, this generational definition became destabilised, partly because of an emerging orientation towards post-materialism (Inglehart 1977) and partly as a result of the diversification of available lifestyle options which both reflected and shaped a more fragmented consumer market. As people began to live longer, settle later and encounter culture less deferentially, youthfulness came to be seen as a self-proclaimed identity rather than a biological status. Western societies, in particular, began to experience cohort trends: where once it was 16-25 year-olds not reading newspapers or watching television news, it was now the previous generation of 16-25 year-olds, carrying old – or young – habits into middle age. Millions of middle-aged people buying Harry Potter novels, tuning into “yoof” TV shows and pursuing recreational lifestyles that were once the province of the pubescent demonstrate that youth is more of a disposition than a condition (Lury 2001; Kearney 2004).

As people spend more time as disembodied surfers within cyberspace, elective identities become easier to adopt and manage. Sites such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, originally populated by kids looking for a safe space to meet and explore, increasingly appeal to post-adolescents attracted to the energy, ephemerality and anonymity of network sociability. The old notion of youth as “stuff that will not endure” is waning, as more adults than ever before find themselves attracted to the aesthetics of abiding youthfulness.

The dispositional conception of youth is intimately related to the idea that in late-modern society, in which the moorings of tradition and convention

have come adrift, people increasingly see their lives as projects of identity construction, manifested through displays of self and selective patterns of consumption and interaction. Giddens (1991) refers to these forms of biographical reflexivity as “life politics” – a very different kind of politics from the collective, institutionalised kind that young people have traditionally been taught about in preparation for adult citizenship. In the realm of life politics people are engaged, from the earliest ages of consciousness, in a struggle for self-actualisation. As in all political struggles, they find themselves up against structural obstacles to behaving, communicating and performing in ways that allow them to be themselves, but political ends are not conceived in terms of the re-arrangement of impersonal structures. The notion of life politics should not be understood as mere post-materialist foppiness: a shallow obsession with aesthetically-stylised self-presentation. There is an ethical dimension to the politics of lifestyle which connects expressions of identity to the social allocation of values. Contrary to the repressive rationalism of old-style politics, with its laboured demarcation between professed values and embodied displays of those values, contemporary citizenship is increasingly performed and evaluated in terms that are best apprehended in aesthetic terms.

While government policies are confined to appeals to youth as apprentices inhabiting a biological limbo between total dependence and responsibilised independence, they will stand little chance of grabbing the attention of the fragmented tribes (Maffesoli 1996) for whom youth is not a condition to transcend but an identity to be fashioned, sustained and vindicated. Young people who see themselves as apprentice citizens may well be attracted to online chats with MPs, membership of youth parliaments and Boy-Scout-style social volunteering, but such “dutiful citizens” (Bennett 2007) are fast becoming a dwindling minority. That does not mean that citizenship is dead or dying, but that it needs to be re-imagined for an era in which the formation and promotion of expressive identities is more important to young people than the codes, hierarchies and rituals of official politics.

Citizenship as a Creative Act

To be a citizen in a representative democracy is not only to be spoken for by others in councils, parliaments and global fora, but to be accorded political reality through the imagination of others, such as politicians, editors, journalists, pollsters. Projects intended to train young people to become good citizens have tended to place emphasis upon learning to cope with the political world in non-political ways; that is to say, acting in but not on the world; pursuing a repertoire of duties, ranging from attending the polling station to following the daily news, without embracing the passion, contentiousness and outspokenness of the political activist. The objective is to inspire obligation rather than fervour. Contrary to this rather anaesthetised conception of active citizenship, Barry (2001: 207) has argued, that the political is best understood as “a space of dissensus and

contestation which is not reducible to politics” and therefore, paradoxically:

[O]ne of the key functions of established political institutions has always been to place limits on the possibilities for dissensus and restrictions on the sites in which political contestation can occur. What we generally term politics this always has something of an anti-political impulse (Barry 2001: 207).

In recent years there has been a pervasive failure of appeals to forms of dutiful citizenship (Bennett 2007), intended to reinforce politics and diminish the political. This is disconcerting for political elites. Policy-makers have turned to other strategies of persuasion, focusing upon the creative dimensions of citizenship which, it is argued, is not only about being spoken for, but about speaking for oneself; not only about having culture made by others, but contributing to the collective imagination of what social reality might mean. This instrumental notion of civic engagement is neatly encapsulated in the foreword, written by the UK Government's Young People's Advisory Group, to a policy document entitled *Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say*:

We as children and young people know what we want. The only way we can change things is to make sure that people who make decisions know what we think and what we want. If you don't get involved you are likely to get only what other people want (Department for Education and Skills 2003).

The argument here suggests that “children and young people” possess a set of group interests and preferences that need to be articulated and heard. But is that so? Do young people attending failing state schools want and need to say the same things as students attending the top private schools? Are the concerns of young workers about the minimum wage identical to those working their way up through the financial sector? Do white British young people really know what Asian Muslims want? Can a single youth voice ever articulate the diverse and subtle distinctions between competing subcultural identities? The claimed homogeneity of youth demands is unconvincing in its attempt to conjure up a univocal representation of age-based interests and values. Similarly, the instrumental claim that “the only way to change things” is to be heard and understood by “people who make decisions” may be more reassuring to political elites than to youth. The injunction to “get involved” is too broad to be meaningful; not all forms of involvement are as expressive or effective as others and some modes of activism are discouraged by the very institutions that teach citizenship education. For example, some school students who took time off school to march in the streets against the war in Iraq were subsequently suspended as a punishment for their inappropriate behaviour. Reported on the BBC News website, 16-year-old Elena Grice from Essex, who was suspended from school for six weeks, commented that “I want to go to school – all I was trying to do was give the children of our school a voice and I have been punished for it” (BBC News website, 4 April 2003).

Given that governments and educators are mainly concerned to encourage young people to participate in the political world without contesting the terms of social power, there are limits to the credibility that instrumentalist claims can inspire. Managed agency soon begins to feel like ventriloquism, with apprentice citizens merely moving their lips to follow a script articulated by others. Until young people are able to witness tangible outcomes from instrumental activism, they are likely to remain civically disengaged.

An alternative approach to the promotion of citizenship focuses upon the affective benefits of democratic engagement. Forsaking the sober rationalism associated with traditional practices of citizenship, contemporary social activists are inclined to construct creative fusions between lifeworld pleasures and effective political interventions. Appealing to individual performances of identity rather than goal-oriented collective action, the promotion of affective citizenship seeks to link the aesthetic and ethical bonds that connect people to their identities with forms of expressive civic behaviour through which such personal identities can be articulated politically. Repertoires of affective engagement promise rewards of solidarity (in sending a text message to the G8 leaders as part of the Make Poverty History campaign, for instance) or feelings of virtue (as when buying fairtrade groceries or boycotting a particularly unethical brand.) In her study of Surfers Against Sewage (SAS), a pressure group established by Cornish surfers campaigning for cleaner seas, Wheaton (2007) provides a fascinating account of how a group of conventionally non-political young people came to set a political agenda. One 21-year-old male survey respondent described his reason for joining SAS as being to “party with everyone else of like minds” (ibid.: 290). From anti-globalisation protesters dressed as turtles on the streets of Seattle to YouTube videos mocking over-serious politicians, civic practices are taking critical and parodic forms, often subverting the norms and protocols of text- book citizenship.

In attempting to tap into contemporary currents of affective citizenship, policy-makers have strained to find ways of making the political process



Aguilera does patriotism¹

seem relevant, exciting and humane. In the United States, Rock the Vote, an organisation which “uses music, popular culture and new technologies to engage and incite young people to register and vote in every election” (Rock the Vote website, 2008, About Rock the Vote section), launched its campaign for the 2008 presidential election with a video featuring Christina

Aguilera wrapped in an American flag singing “America the Beautiful” as a lullaby to her newborn son. The unsubtle semiotic message here is that even

the youngest of infants is a member of a political community and has a stake in the shaping of its future.

When MTV Europe ran a similar campaign in the run-up to the 1994 elections to the European Parliament, Bill Roedy, President of MTV Europe, explained that “we are trying to make voting cool” (*International Herald Tribune*, 30 May



Tony meets Homer²

1994). Such attempts to adopt “the gestures and images of popular culture” (Street 2004: 449) are not confined to electoral moments. In 2003 British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, appeared as himself in a voice-over on *The Simpsons* and in 2008 his successor, Gordon Brown, made an appearance on *American Idol*, using the occasion to promise to pay for 20 million mosquito nets for malaria-hit countries.

Translation from the civic and political into the popular and political into the popular is not always a smooth process. For some political actors, affective appeals go badly wrong. For example, when the left-wing politician, George Galloway, appeared on *Celebrity Big Brother*, stating that he wanted a “chance to show a large and different audience what I’m really like” (BBC News Online, 6 January, 2006), his on-screen performances as a cat, sipping milk provided by the actress Rula Lenska, appears to have damaged his political persona. As one fellow housemate put it, “If he thinks, ‘well, I have got to appeal to a young demographic, what am I going to do? Go on *Big Brother*’, it’s just a bit too obvious. I think that everyone in politics is going to think



Revolutionary act?³

he’s a joke” (Preston quoted by Cardo 2008). In a visit to Galloway’s East End constituency, the Government Chief Whip, Hilary Armstrong called on the MP “to represent and respect his constituents, not further his own ego, as he is by remaining totally out of touch in the Big Brother house” (BBC News website, 13 January 2006).

Galloway's fate symbolises the risks involved in endeavouring to make political performances seem "cool". In depending on the broadcasting paradigm of transmission to a mass audience as a means of publicising their affective displays, politicians reinforce the notion of citizenship as being acted for rather than self-activity. The persona of the cool, concerned or carefree politician, just like that of the authoritative, demagogic or aloof politician, is a performance to be observed rather than a relationship with which to engage. Policies intended to promote active citizenship therefore face a technological dilemma. If democratic citizenship is to amount to more than being spoken and acted for by others (usually elites), what and where are the systems, tools and skills that can support a self-articulating demos? In recent years this question has rarely been answered without reference to the new communicative ecology of the internet, which is sometimes presented as a panacea for the ills of political democracy. But what precisely do these references mean and imply? In what sense does the internet open up the kind of civic space in which citizens can act for themselves?

MySpace, OurSpace and TheirSpace

Government policy-makers have come to regard the internet as, firstly, a means of supporting, promoting and integrating the public operation of democracy, and secondly, a challenge to twenty-first-century citizens, who are expected to learn to spend time online in order to play their part not only in employment, education and commerce, but also political life. As vast resources are dedicated to the design and implementation of technologies of e-governance – the digitised coding, processing, storage and distribution of data relating to the delivery of public services and the generation and circulation of official information –, a number of policy-makers have become enthused by the ambition of utilising the interactive features of the Internet with a view to opening up a space of dialogical communication between citizens and their representatives. Worthy, and often genuine, though this policy objective might be, it is marred by at least three persistent misconceptions.

The first of these arises from a confusion between interactivity and feedback. The emergence of cybernetics in the 1940s led governments to think of "feedback" mechanisms as being integral to the liberal democratic process (Wiener 1948; Beniger 1986). In his study of the British civil service, Agar (2003) has shown how the mechanisation of bureaucratic routines, from the use of punch-cards to computers, served to shift authority and expertise from individual, localised powerbrokers to standardised, institutionalised channels. The notion of efficient government as a self-regulating mechanism which functions best when responding to public feedback combines the consumerist norms of new public management (Osborne & Gabler 1992) with the cybernetic principles of liberal technocracy (Mayr 1976). As an impersonal mechanism for systemic regulation and self-adjustment, feedback encourages neither flexibility nor

creativity. When it works well, feedback manages the irregular and reinforces existing norms. In the context of democratic citizenship, tools such as online surveys, citizens' panels, cyber-surgeries and "have your say" forums are employed by governments with a view to identifying failings in the everyday working of the political system. Feedback mechanisms involving interaction between humans and machines, databases, texts, interfaces or aggregation tools should be distinguished from interactivity as an act of human communication. The latter comprises forms of mediated interaction that allow participants to communicate with one another on a basis of reciprocity, mutual control of the process and a reasonable expectation of being able to affect outcomes. This is quite different from filling in a survey designed to measure satisfaction with council services or submitting a complaint via email. Interactivity, like conversation, entails a mutual and open-ended commitment to speaking and listening, rather than a mechanism for merely registering utterances. Few government actors have shown much interest in making this kind of unrestricted communicative commitment and therefore most e-democracy policy has aimed to stimulate feedback rather than interactivity.

In the case of youth e-participation, government initiatives have tended to encourage managed feedback rather than unconditional peer-to-peer communication. As a consequence, take-up by young people has been modest, especially outside the classroom environment, where they are free to decide what to do with their time. Rather than engage in managed question and answer sessions with councillors and MPs, young people flock in huge numbers to social network sites, such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook, where uncontrolled, lateral interactivity provides a promising setting for autonomous sense-making.

A second aspect of policy misunderstanding relates to the spatial organisation of the internet. Governments have tended to adopt a place-based approach to this dispersed and interconnected network of networks, assuming that they can establish their own bounded institutional online enclaves to which citizens can be drawn. As with parties, parliaments and other political institutions, governments find it difficult to participate in communication environments over which they have little control. Acutely sensitive to risks of being embarrassed, trapped or misunderstood, political elites prefer to keep within the secure boundaries of officially-managed sites, thereby cutting themselves off from the interflowing cross-currents that make the Internet work as a communication space. Online culture is characterised by linkage and hyper-textuality; the significance of any one site is expressed in terms of its connectedness to networks that lie beyond its original range of intended addressees. The logic of broadcasting, within which modern government communication evolved, emphasises the capacity to reach a defined audience; the communicative logic of the internet is viral and promiscuous. As a circulatory medium, the internet is most hospitable to messages which are open, unfinished and amenable to creative interpretation, enhancement and remixing. The language and style of officialdom is at risk of being destabilised within an online culture of pluralistic collaborative

and polysemic sense-making. In the philosopher Richard Rorty's (1989) illuminating terms, the ethos of the internet is antipathetic to "final vocabularies" which close down debate by positing foundational conclusions, and favours instead an "ironic" disposition, which regards the reality, truth and finality of grand concepts like citizenship or democracy as elusive and even illusory. So, applications like YouTube abandon the media's traditional quest for a single objective depiction of reality in favour of a hyper-pluralistic, polysemic montage of reality; Wikipedia resists the ideal of the final word, seeing itself instead as facilitating a perpetual process of redescription; the myriad discussions taking place in the blogosphere seem to be less geared to reaching correct conclusions than linking to dispersed sources of putative knowledge. Irony of this sort is not to be confused with the endless post-modernist pursuit of paradox, but a democratic distaste for the kind of fundamentalist certainty that has tended to characterise the official political sphere.

Tensions between bounded place and porous networks have led governments to take a cautious approach to youth e-participation, encouraging young people to enter official sites, but steering clear of the popular spaces and practices beyond them lest they weaken centralised control. Managed youth e-participation, like much school-based citizenship education, is vulnerable to the accusation of preaching democracy while practising paternalism. For many young people, the presence of government voices online, uninflected by apparent uncertainty or open-mindedness, only serve to reinforce the image of "politics" as an encoded and inflexible domain. This contrasts conspicuously with the free flow of sense-making that the internet, at its best, facilitates.

Re-imagining Policy: From E-participation to E-democracy

In a previous work, I set out ten principles which might lead to the realisation of a productive policy convergence between managed and autonomous e-participation (Coleman 2007).⁴

My argument was that neither managed nor autonomous schemes, strategies and policies for youth e-participation are well suited to achieving democratic outcomes; the former because of their restrictive approach to the agenda, content and flow of communication; the latter because of their limited capacity to influence decision-makers. My aim in this chapter has been to illuminate the conceptual differences, misunderstandings and conflicts that underlie these contrasting perspectives. By examining critically the ways in which notions of youth, citizenship and the internet are framed and connected, it has been possible to elucidate the ambiguous terms of policy discourse. This ambiguity is exacerbated by the seemingly innocent semantic interchange in policy rhetoric between the notions of e-participation and e-democracy.

The promotion of civic participation is not necessarily a democratic aspiration. Insofar as democracy is based upon the fundamental assumption that "no single person or minority group can rightfully claim to have an equal or

superior insight into the best interests of citizens, either individually or as a whole" (Saward 1998: 21), the active participation of citizens in expressing, contesting and debating their interests, preferences and values is integral to the working of democracy. However, the act of participating is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the realisation of democracy. The latter requires more than the involvement of citizens in their own governance, for in certain political circumstances such participation might amount to little more than collusion in authoritarian rule. Democracy entails not only public participation, but a "necessary correspondence between acts of governance and the equally weighted felt interests of citizens with respect to those acts" (Saward 1998: 51). In short, democracy can only be said to exist when there is a tangible and congruous relationship between public inputs and political outcomes.

It is not difficult to think of situations in which citizens are urged to participate in a political process without being accorded much or any chance of determining its outcome. For example, citizens might fill in surveys about local services, join consultative panels to offer their comments about future environmental policy or cast phone votes in television polls about government foreign policy, but there is no guarantee that political authorities will act upon or even take note of their recommendations. Indeed, there is much empirical evidence to suggest that responsive government is quite rare and that political elites are disinclined to be guided by citizens' insights regarding their own best interests. Although the rhetoric of democracy is widely employed in promoting a range of e-participatory activities, from submitting questions to politicians' blogs to signing e-petitions, the reality is that these modes of e-participation are not intended to constitute democratic acts, in the sense of achieving a correspondence between governance and citizens' felt needs. Making it easier for citizens to participate does not, in itself, strengthen democracy.

Policies for managed youth e-participation emphasise taking part, as an end in itself; rather than political influence or palpable outcomes. Indeed, the managerial conception of youth engagement seeks to draw a clear line between the chance of young people to be heard by those in authority and the right of apprentice citizens to determine who should possess authority and how they should exercise it. Autonomous youth e-participation is more promiscuous in its use of democratic rhetoric, but, given the institutional realities of representative democracy, is rarely in a position to realise democratic outcomes. While the autonomous approach to youth e-participation is often more politically creative, emotively expressive and educationally stimulating than the dull political simulations typical of the managerial approach, its value derives from the affective benefits of solidarity rather than the functional claims of political instrumentality.

E-democracy is predicated on three assumptions, none of which necessarily apply to e-participation: firstly, that the aim of communicative interaction, and technologies which support it, is to enable citizens to establish for themselves their own best interests; secondly, that governance must be ineluctably attached to the felt needs of citizens; and thirdly, that political processes, institutions and

relationships are constantly open to scrutiny, revision and re-invention by citizens. In short, whereas e-participation enables people to act in accordance with policies that have been already determined by others, the function of meaningful e-democracy is to engage people in the framing of policies and the determination of outcomes. This is compatible with the principle of political representation, insofar as e-democracy might be geared towards agenda-setting, policy deliberation and public accountability rather than plebiscitary ends (although the latter should not be ruled out on all occasions). But, unlike e-participation, which invites citizens to act upon existing arrangements and consequences of power, e-democracy renders power itself amenable to the actions of citizens.

In relation to young people, this has manifest consequences for their engagement in schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods. To be encouraged and enabled to participate in an inherited system of power relationships, in which one's cultural role has already been imagined by others, is one thing; to be in a position to imagine and shape such a role is to be democratically empowered. Policies for youth e-democracy, then, must aim to do more than provide a technocratic fix for elite-defined pathologies. It must firstly, facilitate a journey of the imagination, moving from the fixed contours of youth and citizenship as acknowledged entities to the radical challenge of political self-determination, and secondly, enable young people to have direct impact upon the institutions, rules, policy processes and pedagogical regimes through which they are governed.

Notes

1. <http://www.reserveresult.com/2008/06/christina-aguilera-max-rock-vote.html>
Michael Caulfield: Wireimage.
2. <http://www.fancast.com/blogs/best-of-the-guests/top-20-guest-stars-on-the-simpsons/>
3. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/row-over-mps-favoured-charity/2006/01/15/1137259944358.html>
4. The aim of these policy principles was to provide a basis for a coherent policy for youth e-citizenship appropriate for a democracy that young people do not merely inherit as found, but make for themselves through creative experience.
 1. Government is willing to fund, but not directly manage or interfere with, common online spaces in which young people are free to express themselves as citizens, and about the terms of citizenship.
 2. Online democratic spaces for young people shall include horizontal channels of interaction, through which networks and collective associations can be formed, as well as vertical channels, providing dialogical links to various institutions that have power and authority over them.
 3. It is up to young people to set the terms of their own political debate, without any external censorship.
 4. E-citizenship involves both free expression and consequential political engagement. Young people are not be expected to participate unless the scope and terms of their influence is explicitly outlined.
 5. Amongst other aspects of e-citizenship, opportunities resources will be provided to ensure that young people encounter others with whom they might disagree strongly, within various kinds of deliberative settings.

6. Young people are encouraged to mobilise online to counter social injustices and broaden the political agenda in any way that they see fit.
7. While e-citizenship embraces traditional questions of power, inequality, organisation and ideology, it does not exclude everyday political experience, such as the negotiation of feelings and sensitivities, the governance of spaces and relationships, and the many intersections between popular culture and power which affect life and lifestyle.
8. Young people are urged to use digital technologies innovatively with a view to utilising and expanding their democratic features.
9. It is within the scope of youth e-citizenship to raise challenging questions about the nature and political status of children, adults and youth, and to challenge condescending or stereotypical notions of youth identity.
10. All e-citizenship policy will be determined in partnership between official policy-makers and young people themselves, using wikis and other forms of collaborative decision-making software.

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Chapter 5

As the World Spunks

Does Internet Help to Transform Youth Journalism?

Linda Duits, Liesbet van Zoonen & Fadi Hirzalla

In November 2003, the Dutch Press Fund awarded seed money of 50,000 euros to the website *Spunk*, an online magazine produced by and aimed at 15 to 19 year old youth, and consisting of news, discussion boards, reviews, columns, background, video and other material. The Fund argued that Spunk was significantly different from other news media, that it enhanced the diversity of information and opinions, and that it provided an innovative contribution to online information. Moreover, the Fund said that Spunk diverged from other youth sites and magazines by offering young people's perspectives on the news and society.¹ The latter coincided well with Spunk's own *raison d'être*: its founders were dissatisfied with the existing online and offline magazine offer for youth and wanted to make something that would better reflect current youth's needs and interests, and that would be made by youth themselves.

The Spunk case seems to display how the internet provides simultaneous potential for top-down *and* bottom-up transformation of journalism. For the Dutch Press Fund, a governmental body set up to support pluralism and innovation in the Dutch press, subsidizing online news provisions is a key instrument for its aim to modernize print journalism. For young people dissatisfied with the prevailing news and magazine offer, the internet provides an opportunity to create and disseminate their own topics in their own style from their own viewpoints.

Yet, as we will demonstrate in this chapter, such appraisals obscure fundamental contradictions between, on the one hand, the standard assumptions and requirements of Dutch media policy and those of normative media theory in general, and on the other hand those of current identity politics, for which internet has become the main medium of expression and communication. We investigate these contradictions by first describing the Spunk site and its content and style in more detail, reviewing what kind of innovation the Dutch Press Fund attributed to Spunk and analysing whether and how Spunk indeed offers such innovations. Second, we use these analyses to reflect on the contradictions between traditional media policies and normative media theory built on notions of representation on the one hand, and current identity politics based

on the concept of performance on the other. We argue that this contradiction has not been solved in the Spunk case. On the contrary, the young voice that is expressed on the site is a very limited one, and one that seamlessly inserts itself into the mainstream discourses of a modernist and adult public sphere, thus negating both the potential of the internet to provide a platform for alternative voices *and* the aims of media policy.

Spunk and Innovations in Journalism

Spunk calls itself a multimedia platform produced by very young media makers.² It is said to be the biggest online youth magazine of the Netherlands. The site is relatively simple, with red and black letters on a white background, many pictures, and a more elaborate logo in italic red and yellow. The homepage furthermore contains a top five of most read and most discussed articles, and consists of verbal and visual items that link to (archives with) news, columns, videos, agendas and some advertising. From its start in 2001 until 2007, Spunk had a regular collaboration with one of the leading Dutch dailies to republish excellent or provocative online columns in its Saturday print edition. However, a lack of synergy and possibilities for expansion made Spunk cancel this cooperation, and focus on the network site *MySpace*, where Spunk initiated its own video channel. One of the columns is also read out weekly on a Dutch radio station.³ Furthermore, Spunk has joined forces with a Dutch literary publisher to put out the work of young authors.

The content of the site is produced by a team of about 15 writers and video makers who are between 15 and 19 years old and diverse in composition. It includes ethnic minorities and homosexuals, and usually has an equal amount of men and women. The team meets weekly to discuss ideas and deadlines, and produces three new written and one video item a day. An employed editor in chief, who is somewhat older than the team,⁴ is responsible for the overall planning, output, quality and balance. The current editor in chief has an advanced education in journalism and some years of experience in print magazine editing. She claims the site attracts some 150,000 to 200,000 unique visitors a month.⁵ Financial management, advertising acquisition and technical support are provided by a small independent publishing house that also took the first initiative for Spunk. While the site has not generated profit in the years of its existence, according to the editor in chief, its aim is to:

[A]ttract an unbelievable number of readers. That's what we want, and we want every youngster to know Spunk and our many outlets. So, we also intend to publish a print magazine. We simply want to become very big, a really big and famous medium.⁶

As a matter of principle, each item on the site contains an option to react, a feature which is thought to be highly appreciated by readers. When in a par-

ticular week the reaction link to the articles failed, the number of site visits was said to have diminished by half.⁷ Yet, items that end up in the top five of most discussed articles usually draw no more than 150 reactions, according to Spunk's editor. With some frequency, these comments are insulting, violent or outright hostile and have to be removed by the editor. The site also contains a general call to 15 to 19 years old to send in their journalistic work and suggestions for what they would like to do for Spunk:

You want to participate in *Spunk* and you are between 15 and 19 years old? Then send us a mail, with interesting info about yourself, attach some pieces if you have already some written work (for the school newspaper for instance). Suggest new topics that you think should be covered. Preferably very concrete, so not 'something about racism', but 'an article about me being undercover for a week with Mongolians to see whether they have integrated', or something like that.⁸

As this brief review shows, Spunk is characterized by a fundamental choice to enable the input from young people in the media landscape as writers and video makers, as potential journalistic talent and as readers. While these characteristics combined indeed provide a novelty, Spunk is simultaneously made through a professional and traditional production routine established by a somewhat older editor, publisher and technical team. Which innovations did the Dutch Press Fund recognize in this set up?

The application for funding contained proposals to make weekly political animations and to promote Spunk as a website that could be used by advertisers to reach a young target group. In its justification of the funding decision, the Fund identified different innovations, the first one being that the site is made by and for young people and therewith distinguishes itself from other youth sites and magazines. Moreover, the Fund expected that visualising political information through animation, as Spunk proposed, may contribute to new ways of politically engaging the young. Nevertheless, the greater part of the site consists of written material, which is a precondition to receive money from the Press Fund. Finally, the Fund assumed that the particular set-up of the site would make it self-sustaining and possibly profitable with the foreseeable future.

Looking back on the funding application and decision, one can conclude that two core components have failed to survive: there are no political animations on the site and commercial traffic is also hardly visible. The income of the site does cover production costs, but does not generate profits, according to the editor in chief.⁹ However, the first reason for funding still seems valid because the site still systematically tries to express the voices of young people between 15 and 19, which was and is considered a welcome and necessary contribution to the diversity of the Dutch media landscape (*Spunk ontvangt krediet* 2003).

In the remainder of this chapter, we will examine how exactly Spunk expresses this young voice. Our aim is not to measure the legitimacy of the funding

decision with the easy benefit of hindsight, but to discuss more fundamentally whether the classic notion of representation in media policy and normative theory is helpful to assess current performative identity politics for which the internet is the medium *parexcellence*. To do so, we will first look in more detail at the content of Spunk as an instance of the performance rather than of the representation of youth. Then we will demonstrate how such performances collide with basic tenets of media policy and normative media theory.

Performing Youth

Although different academic disciplines approach identity in different ways, some consensus exists about identity being a narrative of the self aimed at producing a more or less coherent understanding of oneself, one's position with respect to others and to society. Yet, these narratives are never finished or stable, and highlight different dimensions of identity. Moreover, they are never autonomously constructed stories but they are enabled and bounded by, for instance, gender or ethnic discourse. Stuart Hall therefore has described identities as “points of *temporary* attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (Hall 1996: 6, *italics added*). How exactly one attaches oneself to the subject positions of discourse is also contingent on particular social contexts, as sociologist Ervin Goffman (1958) already indicated in his classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman uses the notion of performance of the self to indicate that the self is not only constituted through stories, but also through social roles and positions, body language, behavior, dress and style. Implicit in the understandings of identity as narrative or performance is the idea that the self is produced by discursive practices rather than the other way around, or – in the famous slogan of post-structuralism – “we don't speak language, language speaks us”. Judith Butler (Butler 1990; Butler 1993), in particular, has radicalized our understanding of identity by claiming gender identity is not preceded by a biological female or male self that produces narratives or performances. Instead, she claims, repeated narratives and performances sediment in discourses that produces the categories of men and women. Thus, identity is not the reflection of the self, but the production of the self.

These notoriously abstract poststructuralist understandings of identity have their more practical and applied varieties in histories of childhood and youth. As many authors have pointed out, the notions of “child” and “youth” are relatively modern inventions enabled by particular configurations of time and space (Cunningham 2006). The youth culture of the 1960s, for instance, produced a concurrent cultural identity unknown before; that of the person no longer child and not yet adult, engaged in experimenting with life and lifestyles. What exactly this category of youth is engaged in, depends very much on the particular times: youth were defined as a politically rebellious generation in the 1960s and 70s, as generation X defined by political apathy

and consumerism in the 80s and 90s of the previous generation, followed by the MTV or *Doom* generation. However one defines the particular generations of the times, the continuous cultural identification of youth as a separate group caught in a distinct life phase takes up young people and invites them to attach their narratives of self to the particular subject positions that youth discourse offers; or, contrastingly, to explicitly detach themselves from them, but therewith still engaging in the performative repetition of youth identity; an identity, for that matter, that is increasingly unconnected to biological age, but ever more defined by a moratorium on social, professional and family responsibilities (Erikson 1968).

In the Dutch language, there is an adequate expression for the notion that a young identity is a cultural production rather than a reflection of a biological state, namely, *to do young*. This expression is often used in a derogatory way, especially when adolescents observe older people “doing young”. Although in this case, there is no satisfactory colloquial English translation for doing young, in academic identity theory, the notions of doing gender or doing ethnicity point to the performative character of identity. Hence, we propose to think of youth identities as ways of “doing youth” (see also Duits 2007). Therewith, the question through which to analyze the Spunk website is not whether and how their media products reflect their youth, but how the Spunkers *do* youth through their writing and video productions. Moreover, since identities are always multiple and flexible, how do they incorporate markers of other identities such as gender, ethnicity and sexuality in their Spunk performances?

We examined those questions by analyzing 202 columns in total,¹⁰ written by 15 different authors between October 2001 and September 2005.¹¹ The columns were qualitatively analyzed in three steps of increasing complexity (coding, categorization and constant comparison, and conditional relations) using software for the analysis of qualitative data (MaxQDA).

Doing Identities on Spunk

On the Spunk site, these performances are most salient in the genre of the column. The columns are ruminations by Spunk’s young editors, of about 650 words and a picture about events, experiences and random observations in their daily lives. The columns are a quintessential part of the specific Spunk image as shows from their *re*-presentation in other media; for five years the best columns were republished in a Dutch national daily, and a selected one is still broadcast weekly on a Dutch radio station. The columns are also responsible for most of the discussions that the site generates, according to the editor in chief.¹² For instance, a blunt and sarcastic column in June 2005 by then 20-year old Hasna El Maroudi about the differences within the Moroccan community in the Netherlands caused an enormous uproar and threats against the author, who therefore decided she would stop writing.¹³ That caused an even bigger debate and another media frenzy. Since the end of 2004, when

Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Dutch-Moroccan Islamic fundamentalist for his controversial film on Islam and his insulting language about Muslims, these debates are framed in terms of the threat Islam presents to freedom of speech in the Netherlands. Yet, El Maroudi's column had nothing to do with Islam but focused on the supposed backwardness of a part of the Moroccan community.

The particular column exemplified the tone of her longer *Mocro* series of columns in which she wrote about "what it's like to be a modern Moroccan". In this series, the performance of both youth *and* ethnicity is consistently and systematically visible. El Maroudi writes sarcastically about weddings, black magic, strict fathers and other elements she considers central to Moroccan culture. Her style is to insert observations and then claim her own difference. In a 2005 column, for instance, she writes about her friends coming to dinner and the pains she went through to serve them halal food and drinks:

I had made halal burgers, frikadel and chicken. Juice came from *Lidl*, a correct German brand. I had prepared everything in detail and I thought nothing could go wrong. Until I got the Coca Cola out. That was a mistake. My friends told me Coca Cola was conspiring with Jews, and if you mirrored the Coke logo you could see an anti-Islam slogan. Some years ago, this had been all over the news in Morocco and discarded as myth. Yet, my friends are a bit behind and still ready for a life without Coke. I can live without McDonalds. Burger King and Pizza Hut fat are not good for me anyway, I could even live without Coke, but what's next? Do I need to burn my DVD's, ditch American cookies and give up my American dream because they are all part of the global anti-Islam war? I really don't think so.¹⁴

In this column, Hasna El Maroudi puts herself up as a savvy modern youth, who can live without the products of global consumerism but who will not give up her freedom to choose, wittily evoked through her reference to the American dream. Simultaneously, she ridicules her friends as backward followers of the anti-American propaganda of traditional Moroccan Islam. In one of her first columns she constructed a more brusque contrast between herself and other Moroccans by playing with Dutch stereotypes:

I am aware that I embody the opposite of what most people expect from a Moroccan Islamic girl. I don't wear a headscarf, I speak accent-free Dutch, have an outstanding education and have never been in contact with criminal activities.¹⁵

The voices of young Moroccan women, like Hasna El Maroudi, are hardly ever heard in Dutch journalism, and therewith her writing does indeed provide an unusual addition to public debate. While Hasna carefully negotiates a Dutch/Moroccan identity that does not comply with headscarf dominated stereotypes about Moroccan Muslim girls in the Netherlands, she simultaneously produces

two rather common voices in Dutch society: the first one is that of girl power, which also speaks from the bio that is always published right next to her columns: “El Maroudi (20) is a student of French language and culture. She likes shopping and sushi, and hopes to end up working for a French fashion magazine.”¹⁶

The second one is that of the Dutch critic of Islam and multiculturalism, speaking from her emphasis on her modernity and rejection of traditional forms of Moroccan culture. She thus appropriates the voice of the Dutch conservative elite and gives it “authentic credibility” through her insider position as a Moroccan young woman (Leeuw and Van Wichelen 2005).

El Maroudi’s method of contrasting oneself to lesser others is used by many Spunk column writers.

Raoul: I decide to run some errands. I open the door and am scared to death when the sidewalk is filled with an outdoor terrace, filled with hip people staring at me. They must think I am a rich actor or a famous author; how could I afford this house otherwise? I feel quite the man and lock the door, to emphasise that this is my house.¹⁷

Oscar: Why do people want to show off their bad taste in public? Pink rabbits who hold up a little balloon. Ready made love messages, with sleepy eyed bear Bob sighing *I love you* and teenage girls giggling *Oh, how cute*.¹⁸

Hadjar: I look a bit frightened at the woman across. Her hairdo reminds of the natural habitat of the blackbird and her eggs. She must be about 35. She huddles when our eyes meet. I put on some more lip-gloss. No problem that she understands that I do not belong to her kind.¹⁹

Through this trope, the Spunkers set themselves aside, suggesting that most of what they do is of high quality and standards, expensive and generally better than what others do. They often do so in tongue-in-cheek style, seemingly not taking themselves or their surroundings seriously. Unlike their peers, Spunkers distance themselves from popular culture, and express – instead – a preference for serious media like newspapers and newsmagazines, and for high culture such as jazz, French chansons, and classical music:

Ebele: Good music is not philosophy, consolation or unifier. Good music stands on its own. It is about the genius of the composer, the mastery of the musicians and the quality of the instruments. Brahms has no fashionable pretension; his music has been around for ages.²⁰

In the exceptional case that a Spunk columnist does express an interest in popular culture, a range of ironic disclaimers is added to maintain intellectual and cultural credibility:

Raoul: Why do I get bored by literature with an L, food with an F and art with an A? Could I be – God forbid – dumb? I have been watching *GTST* for

ages, I adore Katja Schuurman, I read the gossip magazines and am fond of potatoes and gravy. Alright, but I *do* smoke, I have my gymnasium diploma, my Latin is excellent, I have read *The Discovery of Heaven*, appreciate my escargots, and listen – sporadically – to classical music. I am not that dumb, really. But why, then, don't I understand the finer matters in life?²¹

By opposing themselves to their contemporaries, Spunkers create an exclusive community that provides little access for those with popular preferences, poor writing skills or lower education. The young identity performed in the columns breathes comfort with its own privileged position. The authors from migrant backgrounds, like Hadjar and Raoul in the above quotes, easily take up this discourse, and accordingly accommodate the performance of the ethnic dimensions of their identity. Hasna made her bicultural background into a continuous story, but only to perform her own, supposedly exceptional form of Dutch Moroccan-ness, characterized by modernity, individualism and consumer aspirations.

Like ethnicity, gender was similarly subsumed to the overall identity of elite and savvy youth and rarely entered the columns as a topic of its own. The "Joost"-series is the one exception. In six columns, female author Renske de Greef wrote from the perspective of a man. Joost's masculinity becomes apparent through stereotypical preferences like an obsession with breasts, violent computer games, and football. Such stereotypical masculinities, however, are rare among the male authors and in typical Spunk style turned into rhetoric to bash others.

Ebele: I so wish I was born in a German trailer trash-environment; an environment where men drink beer all day, read incorrect racist papers and fart. They have huge bellies, unshaved sweaty pig-heads and so much armpit hair that it almost turns into dreads. I really wish I were a man like that.²²

Yet, although mocking stereotypes of masculinity and femininity helped the Spunkers to perform their own different young and liberated identities, they did not produce an alternative gender voice as a group of young women and men, nor as individuals. Feminism was neither part of their writings, unless it could be used to criticize the position of women among Muslim migrants:

Hasna: At home, father or brother is boss. Girls always and forever have to obey the male sex. Men are allowed to do anything. They can wander around the Red Light District to behold the human flesh, even if beholding is all it is. And the mother? She cooperates in oppressing the girls. She couldn't have her way when she was young and now it's her daughters' turn.²³

While the very notion of performing identities implies the individual or collective demonstration of difference from others (Woodward 1997), our analysis shows that the Spunk authors do not perform their identity by expressing simply their difference, but by suggesting their pre-eminence over others in the realms of culture, taste and education. The interview with Spunk's editor

in chief confirms the exclusive nature of the site: "You need quite a lot of talent for Spunk. We have people applying every day, but there really is only a limited group of exceptional talent that can work here."²⁴

The writers' often ironic style is another means of superiority, as it puts them at a distance from their topic and from others. Irony, at the same time, provides a hiding ground for discussion about one's ideas. When Hasna El Maroudi decided she would quit her column because she could not bear anymore the hostile reactions it elicited, she wrote in her goodbye column: "I am sick of having offended such a big group of people, only because they did not understand my style, we agreed on everything, didn't we?"²⁵

The area where the superiority discourse sometimes recedes is sex and sexuality. For sure, here too the authors tend to take an ironic upper hand, but here there are more columns that express doubt and anxiety about what it means to be young. Raoul, for instance, is a gay columnist who does not want to represent or perform a homosexual identity; he seldom writes about it and instead focuses on travel and youth. The occasional column that does address his sexuality expresses a longing for "normality" and a struggle with his homosexual desires. Exceptionally, in the Spunk columns, he then does not present himself in an ironic superior way:

Right away I get that waking-up-naked-next-to-a-girl-feeling, which I usually get when I wake up naked next to a girl. Not nice at all. That I cannot do this, how much I would like to.²⁶

A similar struggle shows from a series of columns called "Lust", in which the female author openly writes about her experiments with sex and sexuality. We learn about her (attempts at) masturbation, her experience with anal sex and her lesbian encounters. Author Renske engages in a range of bisexual and promiscuous activities, but in the end it seems she mainly tries these out in order to produce shock value for her column. Each column concludes with candid reflections on the sexual borders that she crossed, and Renske sometimes confesses to a lack of pleasure and the social pressures to engage in abundant sex (again, see Duits 2007): "When you can't tell any stories at a party about fucking on the dance floor, you are pious, bourgeois and boring [...] there need to be some sexual excesses, that is after all what you're young for."²⁷

Having gone over the main dimensions of "doing young" in the columns, it is clear that while the group of authors consists of women, men, homosexuals and members of ethnic minorities, this diversity is hardly reflected on the website. The voice with which the column authors speak is strikingly uniform and exclusive. In a mostly ironic style, the authors express their fastidious views on their everyday lives, friends, family and wider society, constructing themselves as a superior breed of youth that is much elevated above their ordinary peers. This tendency is exacerbated by the recruitment procedure of the Spunk management, which maintains professional editorial control and selects their contributors on the basis of writing talent and level of education.

Depending on the particular topic they write about, we have seen the authors to align themselves with global girl power, the Dutch conservative elite, high culture, individual liberalism, emancipated manhood and womanhood. Although this is a voice that differs from other youth media that habitually feature coverage of consumption, popular culture and appearance, it does not seem to differ fundamentally from the ones that can be found in Dutch news media aimed at grown-ups, be they print or broadcasting. As a result, the columns are easily relocated from Spunk to other, traditional news outlets, like a national daily or a radio station for mature readerships and audiences.

Our analysis thus suggests that Spunk does not really present an alternative young voice, nor that it produces alternative gender, homosexual, or ethnic content. Existing social and cultural divisions are as much a part of this youth site, as they are ingrained in mainstream media. What do these findings mean in response to our opening suggestion that Spunk seems to be a case that shows how internet can provide potential for both top-down and bottom-up transformation of journalism?

Top-down and Bottom-up Innovations?

While Spunk's initial application for funding involved a claim that it would enhance the societal diversity of information and opinions by adding the voice of youth, how such a diversity should be achieved in the everyday production of the site is unclear. The editor says that Spunk aims to get as many readers as possible and to become big. The special contribution of the site, she claims, is that it produces opinions that are different from mainstream ones. Yet, it appears hard to explain how this can be achieved:

I don't know the formula for a young style. It would be great if I would know it of course, but it needs to feel good, something young readers consider cool. You simply feel whether something is a good idea or not, it is hard to put into words.²⁸

Nevertheless, the implicit criteria must be clear, given the rather similar style the column authors use: they apparently easily mould their contributions into the required Spunk ethos of difference. Yet, as our analysis has shown, the authors do not merely produce difference. They perform superiority and exclusivity by contrasting their own experience and opinions as smarter and better informed than those of others, whether young or grown up.²⁹ Moreover, the authors share an ironic and agile writing style, which is further streamlined and smoothened by editorial interventions. The editor, who has had a professional training in journalism school, and some writing experience in national dailies and weeklies, does several rounds of editing before she lets a contribution go to the site:

If I don't find it good enough, I send it back until I find it satisfactory. Even then I might still change things before I send it to the corrector, who will do a final quality check before it goes onto the site.³⁰

There is thus a standard journalistic production process behind the site, and a range of informal and unwritten quality criteria to which the authors must comply. It is a fairly traditional and limiting production routine that does not seem to differ very much from the way mainstream journalism operates. It is therefore fair to conclude that Spunk is much better characterized as a successful training ground for mainstream journalism, than as an attempt to change journalism from the bottom up and produce young citizen journalism. It is little surprise, then, that praise for Spunk's quality comes from mainstream newspapers that claim the writers are "bursting with talent" and produce "unexpected high quality".³¹

The assessment of Spunk from the top-down perspective of the Dutch Press Fund that saw the site as an instrument to increase pluralism in the Dutch media landscape and innovate journalism, depends on whether one appreciates the columns as giving access to and being representative for a different voice. The Fund has functioned as an independent authority to promote pluralism in the press since 1974 (Van Cuilenburg 1998). It pays attention to equal access to all societal and cultural opinions and movements, and to information in minority languages.

There is a direct link from the Fund's policies to normative media theory that stipulates an ideal of media access for all societal views and voices. For instance, Van Cuilenburg (1998) argues that a diversity of information on different values, norms, and ideas might contribute to mutual respect and acceptance. Furthermore, he contends that social change usually begins with minority views. If minorities have enough access, social discussion is bound to get a positive impulse. Likewise, McQuail (1992: 144) argues that pluralist media can contribute to a diverse society in three ways: "by *reflecting* differences in society, by giving *access* to different points of view, and by offering a wide range of *choice*."

The crux in this matter is, of course, the question as to how to assess whether and how individual media outlets contribute to diversity, and whether a particular national media offer as a whole can be considered diverse. The usual approach to this question has been to analyse diversity on basis of a number of social-demographic variables. McQuail and Van Cuilenburg (1983), for instance, argue that media diversity should be assessed based on a dimension of social pluriformity, which they describe on the basis of political preference, locality and region, religious belief, ethnicity and language, and "other bases of differentiation of cultural and social experience" (p. 148) such as social class or gender. In a later work, McQuail (1992: 152) also speaks of subcultural differences, social-cultural minorities, group identities based on class and status, and other marginalized identity.

The implicit understanding in normative media theory is that a social-demographic feature, like gender, ethnicity or political preference, will be *reflected*

in one's writings and expressions. This view, for that matter, also resonates in the critical analysis by the women's and gay movements, by ethnic groups, the elderly or disabled, who all have claimed that their stereotypical representation in the media is a result of the specific composition of the journalistic workforce (male, heterosexual, white, in their 30s and 40s, and healthy). Greater diversity among journalists would thus increase the diversity of their output.

Such reasoning, however, ignores that media production is a collective, routinized process that works against the expression of completely individual observations, thoughts or opinions, and it ignores the performative character of identity. As Van Zoonen has shown with respect to the relation between the number of female journalists and gender diversity in the news, production routines and the input of individual journalists together shape the news (van Zoonen 1988), and the particular articulation of structural constraints of production routines, and the individual agency of journalists depends on genre, publication rhythm and modality (van Zoonen 1998a). In addition, the conflation of a social-demographic category (i.e. being a female journalists) with "a woman's voice" in journalism is fundamentally flawed, as seen from the fact that the increase of the number of women journalists in many news media has not produced greater gender diversity (van Zoonen 1998b), and the fact that the "feminization" of news content, as observed in, for instance, television news, cannot be attributed to an increase of the number of female journalists, but is rather the result of commercial and audience pressures (van Zoonen 1991). Identity is, therefore, not a reflection of a social-demographic category, but is and needs to be performed, as we discussed earlier.

In the Spunk case, we have analysed how production requirements as embodied in recruitment criteria and editorial interventions influence topics and style in a way that makes it hard to claim that the site expresses a diversity of voices. The voice of Spunk is a deliberately exceptional one. While the columnists are all between 15 and 19 years old, the identity they perform cannot be easily qualified as straightforward and universally "young". Spunk columnists instead accomplish a restricted identity of an upcoming elite that stands above the ordinary crowd. Other possible identity performances are much less common on Spunk: they hardly ever *do* boy, girl, gay or migrant. On the contrary, their writings tend to undermine these categories. Ebele makes fun of masculinity; Hasna's ethnicity is a reflection of neither Moroccanness nor Dutchness; and, Raoul does not want to underscore his homosexuality. The social-demographic characteristics of these authors, then, do not predict their performed identities, which is completely understandable in the context of current identity theory, but rather problematic in the context of normative media theory and policy. It is problematic for those dependent on the possibility to categorize people in groups to see whether the voices of these groups are reflected in the media. The mere deconstruction of categories, which is so typical for postmodern culture, undermines the normative theory and policy project and, to date, no new approaches to this dilemma have emerged.

Conclusion

Our conclusions about the Spunk site both from the bottom-up and from the top-down perspective seem to be rather bleak: Spunk neither produces a new citizen journalism of the young, nor does it contribute significantly to the diversity of the overall media landscape. Moreover, as we have demonstrated, the content and form of the Spunk columns neatly fit mainstream discourses. Nevertheless, the site does engage young writers who otherwise would have a hard(er) time finding an outlet for their work. The fact that Spunk engages with other media (MySpace, radio, a publisher) and is strict with its age rules also testify to the fundamental desire of the initiators and current management to provide such outlets for the young. Furthermore, as Spunk itself claims, it does offer something different from the usual youth media market that is pervaded by celebrity pop culture, fashion, appearance and other dimensions of mainstream youth culture. It is precisely Spunk's cultured elitist approach that makes this difference. Spunk's presence construes an opposition between high and low culture that is familiar to the overall media landscape, but new to the youth market. Given that literary publishers, museums, concert halls and the like have repeatedly failed to interest youth for their products, it is all the more striking that Spunk is successful in attracting a large readership with its high cultural ethos. Whether one appreciates or deprecates such a particular contribution, is not only a matter of taste, but also a matter of politics.

Without engaging in such a political discussion, we can identify three other scenarios for policy regarding youth participation in the media, than the one that is based on age particularly. The first one would be to abstain from policy interventions and leave matters to market forces. Recent Dutch media history has shown some examples of new media actors and forms of journalism finding their way to a specific readership. The Dutch feminist magazine *Opzij*, for instance, entering its 37th year of existence in 2009, started without any form of government funding and managed to become a commercially viable magazine that caters specifically for female readers with an emancipatory agenda. In the United States, where diversity is seen as a business asset, the market has also produced specific niche media for migrants, youth and other minority groups (Awad 2007).

A second scenario would be to develop funding policies that are contingent on the specific substantial quality of media initiatives of the young, rather than on the socio-demographic features of the applying group. This kind of funding is found in several sectors of the Dutch cultural industries; the Dutch Film Fund, for instance, distributes money on the basis of quality of script and film plan, and the talent of the applicants. Likewise, the Dutch Cultural Broadcasting fund assesses applications on the basis of artistic merit and the expected quality of cultural output. In both cases, a jury of respected peers decides on the eligibility of applications.³² A third possible scenario would be simply for local or national government to provide media facilities, for instance, through the funding of technical centres for amateur media production. This was the

road chosen in many western European countries in the 1980s for the development of community and local media, and still is a favorite way for community communications in many developing countries (Jankowski and Prehn 2002). Any of such scenarios will provoke discussions, doubts as to their feasibility or outright critique. The task for communication scholars is to identify best practices, and to assess which scenarios work and which ones do not, in which circumstances, like we have attempted to do in this chapter.

Notes

1. Taken from the website of the Dutch Press Fund (consulted on 8 April 2008): http://www.bedrijfsfondspers.nl/uno_kredietenEnSubsidies/detail.asp?pageId=335&mode=&besluitId=9; translation by the authors.
2. <http://www.spunk.nl> (Consulted on 25 April 2008).
3. At the time of writing, April 2008.
4. At the time of writing she was 25 years old. Her predecessor also was in his mid-twenties when joining Spunk.
5. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007); translation by the authors.
6. Idem.
7. Interview with publisher Frank Bierens, *de Volkskrant*, Media, 3 July 2004 (p.24), obtained on 9 April 2008 from <http://www.adhd-plus.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=43562&sid=e23f8a9335a978b6597e34b6f995fbc0>.
8. <http://www.spunk.nl/overspunk> (Consulted on 25 April 2008); translation by the authors.
9. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007).
10. A large part of the excluded columns were travel reports, where none of the selected markers appeared.
11. At the time of research, the website's archive contained 436 columns covering October 2001 till September 2005. All columns were read, and a column was selected when any of six identity markers was present: age, gender, ethnicity/religion (focus on Muslims), political identities, sexuality and subculture/class. In current Dutch societal and political debates about ethnicity, the focus is almost exclusively on Moroccan and Turkish immigrants, and the place of Islam in the Netherlands, thus mixing ethnicity and religion. No markers of political identities were found in the columns, whereas many columns contained subcultural and gender markers. To control the amount of data, we randomly selected recent columns for these markers.
12. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007).
13. She started again this year for the national daily *NRC Handelsblad*.
14. Spunk, 19 May 2005, <http://www.spunk.nl/article/article.php?id=1116516362812> (Consulted on 14 April 2008), translation by authors.
15. Spunk, 13 August 2004. <http://www.spunk.nl/article/article.php?id=1092416256609>
16. <http://www.spunk.nl/article/article.php?id=1127989342218>
17. Raoul, 18-9-2002; translation by authors.
18. Oscar, 1-2-2006; translation by authors.
19. Hadjar, 23-6-2006; translation by authors.
20. Ebele Wybinga, *Concertsnob*®, 18-3-2005; translation by authors.
21. Raoul, 2-9-2002; translation by authors.
22. Ebele, 6-2-2004; translation by authors.
23. Hasna, 17-12-2004; translation by authors.
24. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007); translation by authors.
25. Hasna, 29-9-2005; translation by authors.

26. Raoul de Jong, *Rosie*, 2-3-2004; translation by authors.
27. Renske de Greef, *Lust: Stuntseksen*, 26-9-2003; translation by authors.
28. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007); translation by authors.
29. This observation has also been put forward by Dutch youth-oriented website *Geenstijl.nl*, that is typified by political incorrectness and cynicism, and has denounced *Spunk* as a playground for gymnasium pupils and literary wannabees. http://www.geenstijl.nl/mt/archieven/2008/03/spunk_omarmt_kinderporno.html
30. Interview with Sanne Groot Koerkamp, editor in chief Spunk (29 August 2007).
31. *de Volkskrant*, December 29, 2006.
32. Generally, this is also how academic funding works.

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Chapter 6

Media Literacy/Competence, Participation and Youth

Conceptual reflections 2.0

Maren Hartmann

The promise of media literacy, surely, is that it can form part of a strategy to reposition the media user – from passive to active, from recipient to participant, from consumer to citizen (Livingstone 2003a: 3).

Media literacy is by far not a new concept, but it is becoming increasingly used: hence the EU has developed the “European charter for media literacy” (see below) and published a report on the “Current Trends and Approaches to Media Literacy in Europe”; the UN is engaged in the “Alliance of Civilizations Forum” (where media literacy is one of the main issues) and cooperates in “The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media”; in the UK, the term “media literacy” has officially been included in the 2003 Communications Bill and the German government – as part of a “Safer Internet Day” – recently stressed the importance of media literacy for the information society. These are only a few of many examples of the contemporary prominence of this notion. While regularly framed by politics and policy, media literacy is also an often-used term in popular discourses, particularly in debates around youth and media use by young people (children and adolescents). Such widespread use of the term does not, however, necessarily imply that media literacy is based on a widely agreed upon definition and/ or that its practical implications have by now been understood.¹ Approaches and opinions still vary widely. At the same time, the number of published overviews has risen. These will therefore provide the point of departure for this chapter. Some of these overviews will be used to summarise two seemingly different discourses: media literacy and media competence. In the second part of the chapter, I will use some of the elements gleaned from that analysis to re-think the important and related issue of participation.

Participation often figures in a simple set of assumptions underlying some contemporary discourses about democracy. These suggest that deliberative democracy (the assumed ideal) is generally said to be in trouble, since participation is diminishing; that new media are good for such forms of democracy, since they allow for new forms of participation; and that young people use new

media frequently and with ease. Hence the hope is that new media will lead to increased participation by young people, which in turn will help reinvigorate democracy. While not many authors would directly subscribe to this rather blunt set of assumptions, it can indirectly be found in quite a few treatments of the topic (cf. Hartmann 2005). More nuanced approaches are instead aware of the social differences that tend to prevent both democratic uses as well as the even spread of usage and participation in general.² Or, as Peter Dahlgren put it: “There is no simple technological solution for democracy’s dilemmas” (2007: 1). This does not imply, as Dahlgren also outlines, that there is no *potential* there. Instead, the idea of media literacy picks up on this potential. At the same time, it adds one more dimension to the debate of youth, participation and media: that of responsibility (of the state, the educators, adults, etc.). Media literacy suggests that people need to learn how to use the media, how to understand it, maybe how to produce it, but also that these people (often synonymous with young people) need to be taught how to do so. How this is meant to happen is exactly the question. What are the issues at stake here in the 21st century?

In the third and final part of this chapter I relate the above questions to recent media developments, specifically to what is called Web 2.0, as well as to the widespread debates around it. The thematic focus here centres around Dahlgren’s caution concerning technological solutions. Hence rather than any abstract principle about Web 2.0, it is the actual practice that is important here. Overall, this contribution is meant to critically engage with the “media literacy” concept – with a special focus on youth and participation – and its recent development. My sense is that we need to rethink the concept – to develop what we might call “media literacy 2.0”.

Media Literacy and Media Competence: First Impressions

Media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies (AMLA 2008).

Media competence overall is meant to enable the user to handle the new information processing possibilities competently (Baacke 1999: 31).³

Media literacy is the term mostly used in the English-language contexts, while in German-speaking environments one tends to speak of *media competence*. As the above quotes already hint at, similarities prevail in the two different concepts of literacy and competence (more about the differences will follow below). Both, for example, tend to be located within a media education debate. Especially within Europe, both also have a relatively long history.⁴ While the debates have only been highly visible in the public arena since the 1990s (Buckingham 2005: 5), they are actually at least a quarter of a century old. The academic and especially the pedagogic debate were already raging fiercely in the late 1960s, early 1970s.⁵ One could even go back further than that: some

of the Frankfurt School texts, for example, also deal with the basic question of the adequate handling of media texts by audiences and the therein implied dangers for society (and democracy) (e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno 1989/1944). Ideology (and its relation to the so-called culture industries) lies at the heart of these concerns. The emphasis has clearly shifted since, but some of basic concerns are still very much with us.

Especially the German debates in fact continue this tradition, particularly in terms of the critique of ideology. In the 1970s, the assumed ideology pertained to the construction of societal horizons and collective viewpoints (and not so much individuals' reactions), whereby the possibility for deconstruction processes was also implied. This was an important step into the more recent direction with an emphasis on user agency. Hence there has been a shift away from showing people (young people in particular) the possible ill effects of media, towards developing their own critical media and decoding skills. This is why media competence and media literacy were always seen as important parts within the educational field. These theoretical reorientations towards decoding skills were also reflected in practical approaches that emerged in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Youth centres and similar environments emerged as important educational hubs and began teaching young people to use media to produce their own content. Other parts of the world and other players in society followed suit a few years later: Len Masterman, for example, published *Teaching the Media* in 1985 (Mastermann 1985); the UNESCO began an earnest discussion in 1982, which focussed on media education (as a predecessor of and framework for media literacy – see European Commission 2007a: 10), and the US followed in the early 1990s (CML 2007). The media literacy idea has been spreading even further (and faster) ever since.

One basic agreement in most approaches is that *human communicative competence* is seen as the basis for any literacy, media or otherwise. This competence includes an understanding of the environment as well as an understanding of what is being communicated (and how, by whom, etc.). It also includes the ability to express oneself in diverse contexts. This ability is closely related to different ideas of culture and therefore to different forms of expression over time and in specific environments.

While literacy has traditionally been linked to written language, i.e. to the ability to read and write codified, alphabet-based languages, it is now seen to generally refer to “the interpretation of any and all mediated symbolic texts” (Livingstone 2003b: 5). Print was and is at the core of this kind of literacy, but it is by far not all. By now, not only is the intake of information (e.g. through reading) emphasised, but finding, retrieving, and analysing information have become central elements of the media literacy concept. The range of sources, i.e. media, involved in the process, has also broadened:

...already we have computer literacy, cyber-literacy, internet literacy, network literacy, digital literacy, information literacy. It is unclear how these relate to, whether by contrast or through continuities with, such earlier concepts as

print literacy, audiovisual literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, oral literacy, cultural literacy or social literacy (Livingstone 2003b: 4).

All of these tend to be subsumed under the heading “media literacy”. Hence the first summary report mentioned below also simply combines all of the earlier concepts under this one, enlarged heading. Elsewhere, there has been the call for multiple literacies (see Kellner and Share 2005), which in principle imply the same idea (and thereby begin to answer Sonia Livingstone’s question): building on print literacy, media in many forms are seen as increasingly important for literacy overall. Parallel with these conceptual developments, we note also that media literacy has been declared to be one of the basic human rights.

Media Literacy: Definitions

Following on from the idea of fundamental communicative competences, a recent report on media literacy by the European Commission (2007a) developed the notion of a set of different literacies. The authors divide the field between *classic literacy* (reading-writing-understanding), *audiovisual literacy* (electronic media and the understanding of (sequential) images), *digital or information literacy* (computer and digital media and the related technical skills) and *media literacy* (based on media convergence). According to the report, media literacy “includes the command of previous forms of literacy: reading and writing (from understanding to creative skills), audiovisual, digital and the new skills required in a climate of media convergence” (European Commission 2007a: 8).

This summary is one that tries to include many earlier definitions. Drawing from a review of several diverse approaches (from several countries), the report contributes a good historical trajectory of the debate as well as serves to underline the complexity of the media literacy concept. The authors also speak of the “empowerment, autonomy and participation of citizens” (ibid.: 41) and thereby emphasise a move from the *policies of protection* to the *policies that promote action*. One way that the authors assume this is going to be achieved is through the introduction of new actors (such as NGOs and other civil society actors) in the media literacy area. This is ultimately meant to bring about active citizenship (ibid.: 59-62).⁶ Nonetheless, the authors’ recommendations (ibid.: 75) are in the end slightly disappointing. They tend to stay very much on the level of public discussions of the media’s role. This potential co-creation of media policies by users and policy makers does not seem to do justice to the definitions and discussions outlined elsewhere in the text. Media creation as such, for example, is left aside.

Another EU definition is delivered in the *European Charter for Media Literacy*⁷:

Use media technologies effectively to *access, store, retrieve and share* content to meet their individual and community needs and interests; Gain access to,

and make *informed choices* about, a wide range of media forms and content from different cultural and institutional sources; *Understand how and why* media content is produced; *Analyse critically* the techniques, languages and conventions used by the media, and the messages they convey; *Use media creatively* to express and communicate ideas, information and opinions; *Identify, and avoid or challenge*, media content and services that may be unsolicited, offensive or harmful; Make effective use of media in the exercise of their *democratic rights* and *civil responsibilities* (Euromedialiteracy 2006).

Many elements that can be found in other definitions can also be found here: access to, analysis and understanding as well as usage of media are commonly shared elements (see below). Overall, rights as well as responsibilities are in principle mentioned in this context, but the rights receive more attention. Overall, the emphasis is on the understanding of media rather than the production (the latter is mentioned, but is not key).

A third European Commission definition moves one step further into the production field and at the same time reiterates again the most commonly mentioned aspects of media literacy:

Media literacy may be defined as *the ability to access, analyse and evaluate* the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis and are an important part of our contemporary culture, as well as to *communicate competently* in media available on a personal basis. [...] It should empower them with the critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious consumers and producers of information (European Commission 2007b – own emphasis).⁸

Moving beyond the European Commission, Ofcom, the British telecoms regulator and very active promoter of media literacy, also defines it as the “ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts” (Buckingham 2005: 3)⁹, which translates as *using, understanding and creating media*.¹⁰ A very similar (but earlier) definition is given by Sonia Livingstone. In yet another good summary of the debates, she simply stresses the need to rethink older approaches to include current media developments. At the same time, she offers a definition of media literacy as: “[T]he ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (Livingstone 2003b: 1).

Livingstone’s definition also builds on earlier ones, but by replacing “communicate messages in a variety of forms” with “create messages across a variety of contexts” (ibid.), she pushes the emphasis onto the creation bid. Overall, the core areas (access, analyse, evaluate and create) might be seen to correspond to another widely used distinction between *functional*, *critical* and *active* literacy (see e.g. Barton 1994).

Despite all kinds of smaller differences then, we can see certain similarities and patterns emerging. First of all, media literacy tends to be split up into dif-

ferent aspects. Secondly, most of these aspects overlap: access, understanding, creation, etc. are all at the forefront. Thirdly, the overall aim also seems to overlap: people, especially young people, are meant to become educated in critical thinking concerning the media and potentially also in contributing to public debates. Overall, this is meant to benefit democracy. The framework within which this is supposed to take place is very often still seen as the traditional environment of schools or other education settings, but is gradually also broadening into other areas.

Media Competence: A Definition

Is this the same within the debate in the German-speaking environment? At least the three- or four-fold distinction outlined above is similar to that found in the German theorist Dieter Baacke's work, the assumed "father of media competence" (Schriefers and Bischoff 2002: 9).

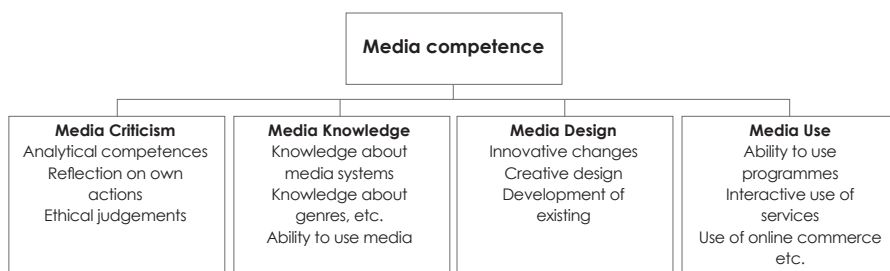
Within the German-speaking context, Baacke was the first to continuously include the media in the literacy (or competence) debates.¹¹ He did so from the 1960s onwards. Thomas Baumann and others, in summarising the theoretical basis of Baacke, mention that one important early influence was Chomsky's linguistic theory in regard to the endless construction of utterings (Baumann 2005: 85). This perspective highlights the perceived limitations of what actually could be taught in a pedagogic context. In other areas of theory, too, Baacke picked up current thinking about the intricate and complex combination of pre-given abilities and social forms (e.g. Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*). Another influence on his thinking came from Habermas, who developed his idea of communicative competence that allows discursive participation processes within democratic societies (and which could at least partly be taught) (Baumann 2005: 85). Everyday life and lifeworld also became guiding concepts within this direction of the media competence debate.

Baacke subsequently went on to explore the potential consequences of such theoretical approaches for pedagogical thinking and for his take on media literacy. Like other authors mentioned above, he also stresses that media competence is one part of a general communicative ability; indeed, his first major book was called *Communication and Competence* (Baacke 1973). Underlying his approach is a relatively broad definition of media (which includes, for example, theatrical and playful forms of communication). Media competence is here seen as a part of a broader social education rather than simply a subject for classroom pedagogy.

Overall Baacke claims that media competence is the ability to use the technology, coupled with the ability to think about media content, to engage critically with it, as well as to potentially draw enjoyment from certain such content (Baacke 1998); I will return to this theme below. He defines media competence as a very basic, but altogether inevitable competence: the one that allows a person to live in a media-saturated world, being able to orient oneself and act

therein. Making sense of the world therefore includes competencies such as reading and writing but also the capacities to deal with the media in relevant ways. Media competence is not something we can learn once, but which we constantly need to acquire anew, to continuously develop. It is seen as an ongoing project that can actually best be taught in projects (Baacke 1999). At the core of Baacke's approach are the four dimensions of media competence: media criticism, media knowledge, media use and media design (see Image 1. below).

Image 1. Media Competence According to Baacke (e.g. 1998)/Hartmann 2009



If we take a closer look at the first dimension, media criticism, we can see that it itself is divided into three aspects: a) the ability to critically assess the media system, i.e. to be analytical; b) to be reflexive, i.e. to critically engage with one's own media use; and c) to assess things from an ethical dimension. Similar differentiations can be found in all four dimensions.

One can also relate Baacke's four dimensions of media competence to those mentioned by Livingstone and others in their definitions. Media use relates to "Access", Media Knowledge to what she calls "Analyse", Media Criticism to "Evaluate", and Media Design to "Create". The same goes for one of the European definitions, only that "Create" here becomes "Communicate". While this difference seems small, I think it expresses something larger that can be shown with reference to Baacke. In his approach, media design is supposed to be *innovative* (which refers to those developments within the defined framework of an existing media system) as well as *creative* (which refers to developments that go beyond the particular media system and its limitations). The latter can refer to changes in the aesthetics or within the usual communication routines or similar changes to established patterns of use and perception. Baacke's competent media use is much more than reception: it is meant to be interactive, i.e. it includes the production of one's own content within the given frameworks, but also pushing the frameworks forward. To "communicate competently in media available on a personal basis" (the third part of European Commission's definition on media production) asks for less. While Baacke's definition is similar, it is also slightly more radical, since it emphasises the creation part in the whole process.

Competence vs. Literacy? Agency vs. Participation?

We have so far seen that there are many definitions for media literacy that share quite a few basics. Baacke's definition of media competence has many parallels to the others, but his emphasises the activity of the users more, especially in terms of questioning the pre-given frameworks of use. The latter is interesting when we look at yet another review of the literature, conducted by David Buckingham.

Buckingham indicates that there are quite a few gaps in the literature – and therefore also in research. He outlines these to be related to particular media on the one hand¹² and specific population groups on the other.¹³ He also adds that “there is a particular need for research about children's ability to evaluate internet content; about their awareness of new commercial strategies in the media; about media production in the home; and about learning progression in media education” (Buckingham 2005: 4). He further emphasises that new media will constantly need to be taken into consideration and that more openness towards sharing research between researchers in academic and industrial fields. He then asks for more observational studies, since these are the least used methods (and are especially valuable in relation to researching children). Overall, one gets a clear impression what is – and what is not – covered in this research field.

Buckingham concludes that while – using Ofcom's definition – use and understanding are relatively well researched, *creativity* is not. This is the outcome that appears to be most interesting in the context of the thus far presented summary and comparison of definitions. Communication by the users, creativity and design, are those areas that research has not looked at and which are therefore probably not central to policy either. What remains unclear is whether media education projects (rather than research) focus a bit more on this – and in what way. Just as Baacke does not simply suggest that some young people should produce some videos or websites, but speaks rather of media design that is of a more pro-active character, so too the media education programmes in question would have to be quite far-reaching. The lack of research and policy (and maybe also programmes) in this field appear to be symptomatic of another weakness: the idea of participation (or engagement) as related to media literacy.

Agency and Participation

If media literacy is a widely used, but rather broadly defined term, this applies tenfold to participation. Again, there are many authors and other actors at play here. So much so that one has to wonder whether participation is by now an empty signifier (cf. Carpentier 2007: 87). Nonetheless (or because of that), it is important to think about this concept. Similar to the distinctions within media literacy, participation is also split into at least two parts: participation *in* the

media (content-related and structural participation, i.e. the micro-perspective of everyday life) and *through* the media (learning to participate in democracies – the macro-perspective) (ibid.). Both are clearly interrelated. And they can be seen to reflect the divisions found in the media literacy concepts insofar as they also divide between an *understanding* and an *action* related to media and media production. Maybe this direction does not quite fill up the signifier, but it hints at what is important in participation and that (and how) it relates to media literacy. If fragmentation, mediatization, consumerism and individualism (cf. Dahlgren 2007: 3-4) are all becoming more pronounced in our late modern societies, it is no wonder that not only democratic participation, but also the assumed solutions and definitions are becoming more thin on the ground (or at least more fragmented). At the same time, we need to commence our discussion with a clarification of how we define the problem of the assumed lack of participation of young people within politics (Dahlgren 2007: 6). Is the aim to return to the established structures or rather to develop new ideas concerning democracy (ibid.)?

Dahlgren's cautious suggestion refers to so-called life politics or alternative politics. On a more basic level, informal learning has been suggested as a possible solution for increasing media literacy and hence participation, while popular culture has equally been suggested as a possible extension of current approaches (see discussion below). However, these "solutions" all act on different conceptual levels. Dahlgren is pointing to areas where politics might be taking place; the informal learning idea refers to approaches on how skills can be acquired that encourage participation. The same applies to relying on popular culture as a resource for learning communication skills; this similarly avoids addressing questions about content, e.g., politics. Democracy is therefore initially reduced to concerns about communication, information-seeking, and deliberation skills. Further, participation is here not understood in the traditional manner associated with democracy (being informed about official politics, voting processes, potential engagement for party politics, and so on), but rather as communication and engagement with fellow citizens. The latter is seen as constituting the creative action that was mentioned above. Hence different forms of expression and different media (broadly understood) would be used. The starting point would be the lifeworld, rather than traditional politics and ideas of democracy. Thus, it is clear that there would be no interrogation of prevailing power relations and that non-participation would not disappear as a problem. Additionally, there remains the problem that an emphasis on "action" avoids addressing the phenomenon of non-engagement – probing the (even legitimate) reasons that young citizens may have for not getting involved. Conceptual solutions will have to be less general; this includes the context of where these things should both be taught and applied.

Just as Dahlgren (and others) underlines, participation (he calls it "civil engagement" in this context) cannot normally be learned (and neither taught) in formal environments. Dahlgren mentions the aspects of non-linearity and non-hierarchy as well as the diversity of the social environments within which

the learning takes place and finally the fact that such learning is generally driven by the subjects' (contextually bounded) motivations (Dahlgren 2007: 9) to underline where participation ultimately takes place. Dahlgren is not alone with this view. In our own study, for example, we also found the importance of informal learning for democratic understandings, in this case, however, within family contexts (Hartmann, Carpentier and Cammaerts 2007). To this, I would like to add the note – perhaps seemingly contractory, but really not so – that formal education does not necessarily lose its importance in this context. It is just that informal approaches are growing in significance and should be combined with the formal ones. Overall, education needs to be understood from a wider, everyday perspective that puts a particular emphasis on specific contexts.

For basic education, such as fundamental literacy as well as general skills and knowledge, formal instruction has maybe lost its exclusivity, but not its continuing importance. In fact, there instead appears to be a growing need to ensure the continuation of the basic delivery and improvement of such education. Hence for developing the *understanding* deemed necessary to deal with the media, formal education needs to continue and improve its role (and this clearly applies to teacher training as well). The creative *action* to be promoted in regard to the media, however, might be better encouraged elsewhere – or at least brought in conjunction with other environments.

This division though is far from enough. Within both environments, there needs to be an opening up towards the playful and the popular.¹⁴ The process needs to become more bottom-up: top-down approaches have proven not to work.¹⁵ This requires considerable tolerance and openness in terms of overcoming traditional understandings of authority and learning. The informality required is clearly more difficult to regulate and assess. However, it has been shown that informalisation and contextualisation are on the rise in relation to young people and new media (Tully 2004).¹⁶ While my own research on young adults and new media points less to informalisation, it does underscore the strength of playful appropriation (Hartmann 2005). For many aspects of media literacy, this promises good outcomes. Where it is probably least far-reaching, is in terms of critical assessments of the media. Here, additional approaches are necessary. While criticism can also be taught in playful ways, it needs to be much more focused on the contextual aspects, i.e. it needs to better understand the individual's position and experience as well as encourage many diverse approaches.

These contextual aspects can include the use of popular culture, i.e. participation here becomes broadened (or maybe even redefined) to include other forms of knowledge and communication than those usually referred to in regard to democratic participation. This would require a loosening of traditional notions of participation – which increasingly do not fit with the realities of contemporary democracy – and an expanded notion of engagement, as Stephen Coleman (2007) outlines in his analyses of young peoples' responses to *Big Brother*. Hence, as hinted at above, participation returns to its very foundations: it relies on an exchange of ideas, an accumulation of related knowledge and expertise,

on a notion of making choices – and perhaps also on the experience of “fun” and “distraction” in areas ostensibly remote from democratic concerns. The Habermasian ideal of the public sphere would need to be further enlarged to incorporate such elements. What becomes problematic, however, is precisely the relationship of this kind of “informal”, or non-political participation to its more traditional forms associated with democracy.

The informal learning environments thus introduced can be a youngsters’ circle of friends, a meeting place, a club, a garage, a LAN-party – wherever young people meet outside of the relatively controlled environments of school and home (cf. Vogelgesang 2004). The informal learning idea emphasises that the user is at the centre of all of this: it shows that many competencies and skills relating to media literacy will be learned more or less *en passant*. The implication of this is not, however, that the earlier mentioned responsibility for either side is diminishing. Quite the opposite: as soon as learning and its outcomes move out of the established routes, responsibility for all involved (including the young people) increases. The pressure to make the right choices, to get additional knowledge where necessary, and so on, is amplified. More often than not, the basics for participation still get taught in more formal environments. These basics might include the old-fashioned literacy skills, but they also include social skills, critical thinking, and, notably, a certain form of self-reliance and self-assurance. An awareness of what kind of learning is necessary in today’s world is increasingly important, not least for young people. It may be, in fact, that curiosity is the most important “skill” to be taught in these contexts.

Most discourses about media literacy remain too much at the level of the formal education environments in the sense of putting all responsibilities in the classroom, rather than seeing it as just one (albeit important) part of the puzzle. The family tends to also get mentioned, but much less can be found on other environments – at least for these specific forms of learning. These are, after all, environments that the researchers themselves potentially do not know about (or maybe do not even understand). Therefore, a more immersive, bottom-up perspective is required – first of all to simply understand what kinds of participation and agency exist in these contexts.

Along with changing learning environments and learning forms, we are posed with yet another problem that tends to be ignored by existing media literacy approaches. The point was only mentioned in passing so far. It is the – slightly provocative – assumption that agency in itself is not necessarily participation, but that we need both. Agency, however, implies choice, and thus non-participation becomes a potential option. This in turn may well stand in conflict with existing ideals of not only citizenship and participation, but also of learning and progression.

Participation hence needs to be understood as more than “simple agency”: it needs to be more clearly related to action. While this might appear to be already implied in the term agency (on a philosophical level it clearly is), in practice participation is often treated primarily as thought processes and decision-making. The notion of “action” that I am arguing for, however, is meant to be

more pro-active in the sense of actual material involvements and consequences. That is to say that the creativity and action is meant to produce something that has a more clearly visible outcome for anyone involved. This does not mean that thought processes are excluded from consideration, only that the emphasis resides on action as here understood. It thereby is not a fundamental shift in definition, but a renewed focus on concrete circumstances. Additionally, the “political” may be relevant here, but is not mandatory.

Also of significance is the relationship of participation to identity, i.e. the performative aspects of the sense of self. In this regard Web 2.0 might indeed be an interesting new media “format” to consider. This would also potentially close the still lingering gap between creation and participation, since creation of sorts is an inherent aspect of Web 2.0. Additionally, the performative and enjoyment factors also come into play here. So if participation is not working too well when it is encouraged top-down – which in fact enhances feelings of powerlessness and reinforces existing barriers to participation – a bottom-up mode might be one (albeit idealistic) solution. This includes the possibility for giving a voice to opposition (of existing media and belief systems), even if such expression may be experienced as awkward in some settings. Participation also tends to work better when the outcome is more apparent and more clearly related to the specific concerns people actually have. These notions are brought together in the context Web 2.0 (see below, but also by Baacke’s idea of media competence being learned in projects (Baacke 1999)).

Media 2.0

While most of the arguments above show that the specificity of the media involved play only a minor role in the way that media literacy is “created”, the next section is nonetheless a brief summary of recent media developments. There are two reasons for this: first of all, many claims have been made concerning Web 2.0’s involvement of (or even reliance on) the media user. Were these to be true, a whole new media landscape – both in terms of production and use – would soon emerge. Second of all, these recent developments do more generally ask for a re-thinking of our existing media user concepts – and thereby also of media literacy. Rather than stating that the technological developments push the boundaries, I want to use Web 2.0 applications to reiterate some of the problems raised above.

The Web 2.0 term first emerged in 2005 (a story that has by now been re-told several times). The term was created by Tim O’Reilly (and his colleagues) in order to think about – as the subtitle of the subsequent paper suggested – “design patterns and business models for the next generation of software” (O’Reilly 2005). Building on the experiences of the first internet bubble that had gone wrong as well as on more recent software developments, O’Reilly summarised the developments and simply gave them a new name. He also combined them so that a relatively new socio-technical phenomenon appeared to emerge.

This phenomenon included – in O'Reilly's description – the following aspects: a) the web as a platform, b) the harnessing of collective intelligence, c) data as the next Intel Inside, d) the end of the software release cycle, e) lightweight programming models, f) software above the level of a single device and g) rich user experiences (ibid.). Most interesting for us (and most social science commentators) is the beginning and the end of this list (all explained here in a rather cursory manner). The web as a collective intelligence platform that offers rich user experiences is meant to come about through the involvement of the users. Once many users contribute, this content (and "intelligence") can be shared amongst them. It is meant to be a "give and take" environment (i.e. a rich user experience), enabled by software made for this kind of sharing.

This can be better explained by having a closer look at one of the terms constantly mentioned in the context of Web 2.0: *folksonomy*. A folksonomy is a user generated taxonomy, i.e. classification system. It is "the practice and method of collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorize content" (ibid.). This involves both the original content producers as well as the media users. Thereby both the process and the content are more open than traditional classification processes (wherefore the whole development has also been labelled "social software"). A simple example for this can be *flickr*, the photo-sharing website. If a user puts a picture online with a certain keyword attached (e.g. "Berlin" and "Universität der Künste")¹⁷, others can find it when they enter the same keyword, since it will be grouped with images with the same keywords, etc. This allows an ordering of content (and therefore networking) via the users. Many other, similar features could be explored here. The question, however, that is interesting in this context is not the individual software programme, but the idea of participation related to Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 applications have been labelled "the architecture of participation" (O'Reilly 2005). If we take, for example, a database, we can see the basic direction of this architecture: normally one either pays people to build the database or one gets volunteers to do it (open source idea). In Web 2.0, however, one uses peer-to-peer, i.e. whoever wants to get something from the database also tends to offer his/her files (or services or skills or pictures, as in flickr) to it. This peer-to-peer file sharing has in principle learned from the above mentioned problems in deliberative democracies and their ideas of participation: instead of building on the illusion that most users (citizens) will contribute much if this involves an effort (e.g. time, extra skills, etc.), they built a software architecture that simply made use of people's existing data (time, skills, etc.). In this context simply using the service can lead to sharing what one has and thereby contributing to the network of content.¹⁸ This is not per se participation in the democratic sense, although the basic structures tend to be. Seen more cynically, one could even describe Web 2.0 as simply a very clever business model that does tend to exploit its users/consumers.¹⁹ On the other hand, one can potentially hold on to the idea of the basic structure that at least in principle allows a kind of sharing that could also be very useful for participation issues. The content, after all, is not pre-given. Different applica-

tions differ widely in terms of their scope. If we then take *twitter*, for example, a micro-blogging site, the sharing needs to be done with slightly more effort (by adding small SMS-like content-bits, i.e. so-called tweets, that can contain anything the user wants to share, including hyperlinks), although one can also remain a relative lurker. In the end, twitter is a highly performative, but in some sense potentially non-sensical communication application that creates a relatively public arena.²⁰ Non-sensical is only meant in the sense that twitter has not been set up to further democratic engagement in the traditional sense. It does, however, create links between people who only partly know each other and the discussions are wide-ranging. There is definitely an engagement taking place. In terms of literacy, twitter is for the moment at least only used by the digitally literate (and so is flickr). The principle requirements, however, are not necessarily high, while the playfulness-level and enjoyment is. Similar to many other Web 2.0 applications, it is relatively personal, i.e. one needs to have a contact, someone one wants to “follow” and then needs to be “followed”.²¹ The content is also based on lifeworld observations.

Translated into the participation vs. agency debate and the question of media literacy, it is not so much the application but rather the general expectation by other users that one should contribute as well as their continuous referral to each other (i.e. constant flow of somewhat erratic communication – see Image 2 below) that makes Twitter as attractive as it currently is. The application is a tool therein, but the social basis has been laid elsewhere. It can, however, be used to enhance the existing and potentially also to create some new interests. Hence while much of “the Web 2.0” does not live up to its

Image 2. Screenshot of Twitter by Maren Hartmann (October 2008)



surrounding discourse of user empowerment (or at least only for a relatively small group of people), its principles can become facts in the future. This only works, however, if those users do not only get to know the applications and how to use and assess them, but also learn to have a basic interest in actively using such services. In the times of Web 2.0, where user-generated-content is a new hype, the knowledge and ability to judge one's own production not just in terms of quality, but particularly in terms of its possible reception and re-use within the public (and commercial) sphere is highly important. Twitter – like quite a few other such applications – offers such a feedback mechanism in diverse ways.

Critical, Creative and Competent: Media Literacy 2.0?

Finally [...] the UNESCO seminar in Seville in 2002 [...] highlighted the need for action through active promotion policies in five areas: 1) Investigation; 2) Training; 3) Cooperation between schools, the media, NGOs, private businesses and public institutions; 4) Consolidation and promotion of the public sphere of society and its relationship with the media (European Commission 2007a: 12).

These kinds of proclamations tend to be the second step in media literacy debates (after the definitions). They are in principle very laudable, but as the above example shows, tend to often reiterate relatively broad and rather well-known patterns. The other direction is very concrete pedagogical concepts. I want to instead use another quote to illustrate what kind of message is potentially hidden in such plans:

Views of what we want to call strong digital literacy should imply a vision of what a desirable information society is all about. The different specifics of digital media – interactivity, multimodality and non-linearity, possibilities for recombination and perfect copying – are not neutral toward established forms of society (Suoranta and Vaden 2008: 41).

As Suoranta and Vaden – in a book on the “Wikiworld” that was immediately distributed widely as a downloadable pdf-version – rightly state, digital or other media literacy does not simply stand for itself, but offers a vision of current and future societies. This is why the basic outline of media literacy is fairly similar in most definitions (both academia and policy), but differs in small emphases. How much active participation is involved in each? And how, where and when are the necessary literacy skills meant to be acquired and/or taught? The answers to these questions remain diffuse.

Literacy in times of Web 2.0 does potentially suggest a different vision of participation. If we follow Coleman's argument, the time might (have to) be ripe for a less idealistic concept thereof that instead begins where participation

does in fact already take place: in the everyday life of popular culture (Coleman 2007). It is then potentially less about the basic understanding of how participation takes place and how the media are to be read, etc. than about how certain forms of participation are possibly transferred into other, more traditionally political areas of life. That also implies a certain transparency on these levels though, because participation needs to be seen to have consequences.

All this still fairly easily translates into a media literacy in terms of the established media forms (television, newspapers, etc.). Here, one could begin with those participation programmes that exist and show how these mechanisms could also be transferred elsewhere. In terms of new media or Web 2.0, however, things get more complex. As Baacke (1999) already made clear: media competence is a project and can best be taught through projects. He lists the ability to decide for oneself, to participate and to show solidarity as important aspects therein. These are rather basic civil practices that need to be learnt, formally, but especially also informally. However, some forms of inequality also need to be addressed first before basic literacy can be taught and learnt.

Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share (2005) argue for a “critical media literacy” that also includes, as has been mentioned, ideas concerning multiple literacies. While it appears important to stress the critical approach within the U.S.American context, within the European framework the critical nature is an inherent part of media literacy as such, i.e. it could not work without a critical stance. Participation is finally becoming an explicit reference rather than an implicit assumption. Nonetheless, it still has an “add-on”-feel to it, i.e. it does not seem to fit in very well yet, plus the concretisation thereof is still missing. Here, more work needs to be done. One of the ways this might happen is to make it a more explicit point on the “action” side. Instead of teaching only skills and critical thinking and an overall awareness in terms of media competences, it would be good to include “democratic, participatory competences”. While these might partly be covered by other subject areas (all the better for a possible collaboration), the linkage between the two needs to become a clear part of the curriculum. And as we should have long learned from the public sphere debates: too much concentration on rationality does neither cover actual actions – nor the ideal. The ideal in this case is rather to access, analyse, evaluate, create – and enjoy. Conceptual reflections 2.0 include more action – and thereby return to the roots. Normativity remains core of these debates.

Or, to put it slightly differently: we need to have two parallel strategies: first of all, we need to have a wider societal debate concerning democracy, its values, its pitfalls – and potential future alternatives. At the moment, most media literacy debates start from the assumption that we will continue with the basic system that we currently have. This, however, might not be possible in the future – or even desirable. Secondly, and on a much more concrete level, the dissatisfaction with existing conceptualisations lies in their limited emphasis on both users’ lifeworlds and project-based bottom-up explorations of what kind of engagements are seen as participation within specific contexts. The most tricky

question then is how to translate this into other areas. Web 2.0 is here simply an expression for technological possibilities – but not solutions. Nonetheless: it might be worth listening to these stories – plus telling one's own.

Notes

1. Nonetheless, one can also find the view that the history of media literacy is a progressive one (cf. CML 2007). In this interpretation, we have taken a long time to fully acknowledge the importance of media literacy, but we have now finally come to see and implement it properly. Hence there is a sense of fulfillment and of a diminishing problem. This perspective is not taken here.
2. These more critical approaches usually do not promote media use as a solution to problems of participation. However, the assumption that media literacy develops in parallel to the exposure to – and use of – certain media, does exist. This connection is also clearly much too simple (see also: Oehmichen 2006: 448).
3. Own translation (MH).
4. For an assessment of the debate in the U.S.A. see Kellner and Share (2005).
5. For a good overview of the debates see Buckingham (2005) and Livingstone (2003a; 2003b).
6. According to the authors of the report, civic participation can also take place in relation to the decisions necessary for implementing media literacy projects in the first place, i.e. not to media literacy in a direct sense.
7. See also European Commission (2007a).
8. Another part of the definition reads as follows: "Today Media Literacy (sic) is indeed one of the key pre-requisites for active and full citizenship and is one of the contexts in which intercultural dialogue needs to be promoted. Also, media education is a fundamental tool to raise awareness on IPR [intellectual property rights, author's note] issues among media users and consumers" (European Commission 2007b).
9. In a presentation at a conference at the LSE (Media communication and humanity – September 2008), Sonia Livingstone showed that Ofcom only very recently managed to address the question of citizens (rather than consumers or customers).
10. Nearly the same definition is also used in the U.S. context. One of the two larger media literacy organisations, Alliance for Media Literate America AMLA, states: "Within North America, media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, and COMMUNICATE information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages. Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages" (AMLA 2008). But while the other big organisation, the Action Coalition for Media Literacy (ACME 2008) shares these goals, the major emphases differ. Hence ACME puts an emphasis on the media (i.e. the system) and the way they should change, while AMLA's emphasis is more on literacy as such, i.e. the people (who are also included in the ACME approach). This underlines that media literacy is – not surprisingly – closely related to overall social visions (cf. Kellner and Share 2005).
11. Wolfgang Schweiger proclaims media literacy and media competence to be synonymous (2007: 266), which I do not agree with. The differences are only slight, but nonetheless interesting.
12. Buckingham mentions radio, mobile phones and online gaming.
13. He lists younger children, the disabled and ethnic minority groups.
14. Especially entertainment (or rather enjoyment) is an under-valued aspect of media literacy. Just as a somewhat positive approach to the media does not emerge from limited, 'rational' uses (see also Groeben in Schweiger 2007: 268).

15. On a more political note, the non-commercial within the informal is something else to be considered. It should be, one could argue, free of pre-given interests. One such environment mentioned in this context are self-organised LAN-parties (Vogelgesang 2004).
16. Contextualisation is here understood as the individual creative act of appropriation of (media) technology. Informalisation, on the other hand, is seen to be the need to create one's own biography, as an answer to disappearing social structures and similar social changes. In this context, informalisation is both a framework and an approach. The approach is informal learning, which Tully (2004) considers as extremely important – generally, but also particularly in relation to media competence.
17. As of the 31st of March 2008, three images were shown when one searches these two keywords. They were all from the same "author", but did indeed represent the University of the Arts in Berlin (and an annual event therein).
18. In a later phase of Web 2.0 this idea was broadened a bit again. User generated content in fact still builds on the idea of users contributing – but not necessarily with the idea of participation in a greater good or even with sharing (files, etc.). Instead, many applications serve the simple presentation of self.
19. Or to put it in the words of a website commentator: "Web 2.0... I take part – you take part – he takes part – we take part – you all take part – they profit (Paris '68 slogan remixed)" (Tartle in O'Reilly 2005).
20. Content-wise twitter ranges from actual political debates to self-referential diary remarks to useful networking of sorts. It is in principle open for anything that can be done within the pre-given technical limits.
21. The first ever twitter-party took place in Berlin in April 2008.

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Part III

Identities and Practices

Chapter 7

The Internet and Subactivism

Cultivating Young Citizenship in Everyday Life

Maria Bakardjieva

Since the early years of its emergence and long before it had turned into a mass medium, the internet has sparked curiosity, debates and dreams revolving around its likely role in the revitalization of democracy. An area of lively scholarly debate on this topic has taken shape in the wake of the early speculations by pundits and futurists (see Friedland 1996; Feenberg 2007). Distinct schools of political theory have envisioned the democratizing potential of the internet differently depending on the model of democracy informing their projections (Street 1997; Dahlberg 2001).

In this chapter, I would like to propose a perspective on the democratizing potential of the internet that directs attention to facets of democracy that have less to do with structure and process – the main focus of traditional political theory – and more with the decisions and actions of individual participants in it. My main preoccupation will be to inquire into the capacity of the internet to enhance democracy through the multiplication and enrichment of the everyday practices of citizenship. By definition, the citizen is the main agent of the democratic system. That is why a thorough elaboration of the different modes of becoming, being and acting as a citizen is imperative for a valid model of democracy (Dahlgren 2003). Voting, polling, deliberating and joining in activist movements certainly represent key acts of citizenship, but they may not make up an exhaustive list. A number of scholars have already sought to expand the understanding of citizenship by introducing notions such as “civic culture” (Dahlgren 2003; 2006), “cultural citizenship” (Hermes and Dahlgren 2006), “public connection” (Couldry 2006; Couldry *et al.* 2007). These are all attempts to grasp the political significance of those “fuzzy or ambiguous phenomena, grounded in civil society and the lifeworld, that fascinate empirical researchers”, as Livingstone (2005: 32) has put it. A common feature of these works is the insistence that we should look for germs and projections of the political and public world in the private quarters and daily dealings of individual persons (see Dahlgren 2003; Couldry *et al.* 2007). Taken together, these arguments mark a “cultural turn” (Dahlgren 2003) in the study of democracy and political communication.

Can this cultural turn be grounded in the everyday and how can such a move inform the understanding of the process of cultivating young citizenship? Young people have been portrayed as a group indifferent and disenfranchised with respect to traditional politics and yet, according to some accounts, very likely to be won back for political participation thanks to the new technical possibilities created by the internet (Tapscott 1998). A phase of disappointment has set in recently because statistics of youth voting and political involvement have remained largely unchanged and youth has been found to populate in massive numbers the entertainment arcades instead of the deliberation spaces and political clubs opened on the internet. Should the triviality of youth's internet use (Livingstone and Bober 2003; Buckingham 2006; Livingstone 2007) be allowed to put the hopes for the democratic invigoration of the "digital generation" to rest? The internet has proven itself not to be an automatic trigger of youth political engagement, but have these expectations been adequate in the first place? With these hopes now waning away, it may be time to ask if the internet's potential as a mundane tool of citizenship has been fully and imaginatively explored and tested. Before this question can be answered a sober and open-minded discussion of what interests and activities count as political and pertain to citizenship has to be undertaken.

The Political: An Expanding Terrain

Beck (1997) distinguishes three ways in which political science has operationalized its concept of politics: (1) the institutional constitution of the political community into which society organizes itself (polity); (2) the substance of political programs that shape social conditions (policy); (3) the political conflict over power-sharing and power positioning (politics). All these dimensions concern collective agents, their activities and interactions. Individuals are absent from this landscape of "the political" (ibid.: 103). This approach to the political assumes stable and even "essential" collective identities and dissolves individuals into them. The individual citizen is subsumed under a certain colour of the political spectrum, a class, a corporate organization, a gender or national/ethnic belonging.

To this traditional view of the political, Beck juxtaposes a new one rooted in the processes of "individualization" characterizing "reflexive modernity". This view is captured in his concept of "subpolitics". Subpolitics represents a new mode of operation of the political, in which agents coming from outside of the officially recognized political and corporate system appear on the stage of social design, including different professional groups and organizations, citizen's issue-centered initiatives and social movements, and finally, individuals (ibid.: 103). This vision introduces political actors organized not only around institutional and essential identities, but also collective agents of less comprehensive and permanent common characteristics and concerns. Symptomatically, isolated individuals are also mentioned as legitimate participants in this new game of politics. The world of politics, for Beck, is no longer that of "symbolically

rich political institutions, but the world of often concealed everyday political practice" (ibid.: 98).

Politics of this new type arises in areas that have typically been seen as lying outside the realm of the political – the private sector, business, science, cities, municipalities, education and everyday life (ibid.: 99). Thus, Beck argues, what appeared to be a withdrawal of the citizenry from politics was actually a withdrawal from the formally recognized political institutions and forms of action. Parallel to that withdrawal, a struggle for a "new dimension of politics" (ibid.: 101) has opened up. Individualized individuals abandon the roles and allegiances handed down to them by custom and venture into constructing political causes and commitments of their own. They immigrate to "new niches of activity and identity" (p. 101).

Identity happens to be the central category around which Giddens' (Giddens 1991) notion of the political in high-modern society revolves. The process in which Beck's individualized individuals "produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves" (Beck 1997: 95) becomes the central playing field of politics in Giddens' view. What he calls "life-politics" exceeds in importance emancipatory politics which used to be the form central to earlier stages of modernity. Life-politics is a "politics of choice" as opposed to a struggle for the freedom to make choices. It is "politics of lifestyle", "politics of life decisions". It concerns "political issues which flow from the process of self-actualization in post-traditional contexts, where globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies" (ibid.: 214). This politics tackles the question "Who do I want to be?"

In his discussion, Giddens gives due credit to the feminist formula "the personal is the political", with which he connects the emergence of life politics as a dimension of the political in high modernity. The equation of the personal with the political, or more precisely the acknowledgment that issues considered to be strictly personal in fact have their roots and projections in the political sphere, has been one of the insights stemming from the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Carol Hanisch's essay "The Personal is the Political" (1970) spelled out the dilemma that plagued women's discussions at that time regarding how to distinguish "therapy" from "political action". What were the issues that had to be confined to the personal sphere of women's lives and tackled within a narrow circle of friends and counselors; and what were the issues that the women's movement could confront in public as properly political? Hanisch is adamant that the discussions women had in small groups focusing on questions of their personal lives and beliefs represented a form of political action. These discussions allowed the participating women to understand that they had to stop blaming themselves for the problems in their lives and to try to change the objective conditions in which their existence as women was framed.

This logic of redefining of the sphere and nature of the political carries some risks, as Mouffe (2005) has forcefully argued. It hides the danger of reverting

the understanding of the political back to the narrowly individual choices and decisions. The place and importance of collective entities in the constitution and operation of the political should not be overlooked, Mouffe insists. She criticizes the individualization theory put forward by Beck, Giddens and feminists, in as much as it downplays the significance of collective identities for citizenship and for political life in general. Beck and Giddens' version of politics in particular, in Mouffe's view, turns a blind eye on power relations, hegemony and the centrality of conflict and struggle to the political process. In her own way, Mouffe places identity at the heart of the political, but for her not just any identity carries the marks of the political. Following political theorist Carl Schmitt, she asserts that the criterion of the political is the "friend-enemy" discrimination: "It deals with the formation of a 'we' as opposed to a 'they' and is always concerned with collective forms of identification" (ibid.: 11). The political is not a sphere of activity or a set of issues, but an ineradicable property of human social organization. Every religious, moral, economic, ethical or other controversy can transform itself into a political one "if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings according to friend and enemy" (ibid.: 12).

Mouffe's vision of the political promises a dialectical resolution of the intractable problem of defining citizenship as active commitment to the public good, while at the same time avoiding the tyranny of some reified idea of the public good and preserving room for individual autonomy, difference and plurality (see also Dahlgren 2007). Her model of citizenship arises from a theory of the individual "not as a monad, an unencumbered self" that exists prior to and independently of society, but rather as a site constituted by an *ensemble of "subject positions"*, inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations, the member of many communities and participant in a plurality of collective forms of identification" (Mouffe 1993: 97). The identity of such an individual is never unitary, homogenous and fixed, but always in flux, precariously defined at the point of articulation of its various subject positions. The subject positions, which the individual assumes are not voluntaristically and randomly dreamt up by the individual. They are "constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but rather a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement" (Mouffe 1993: 77). Very importantly, subject positions that are considered apolitical at a certain point in time can turn into loci of conflict and antagonism and lead to political mobilization and new forms of struggle under different conditions and changed discursive dynamics.

Clearly, for Mouffe becoming a citizen involves the *identification* by the individual with a set of subject positions of political nature, a process that is ongoing and never completed. Identification, Stuart Hall (1996) maintains is not lodged in stable commonalities and solidarities shared by members of "natural" groups. It is a "signifying practice" marked by contingency, involving "discursive work", operating through the "binding and marking of symbolic boundaries and the production of 'frontier effects'" (ibid.: 3). It requires its "constitutive outside", difference, the other.

Hall (1996) offers several compelling observations throwing light on the workings of the process of identification. Identities, he believes, are “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (ibid.: 6). Identities are produced by using the resources of history, language and culture in the “narrativization of the self” (ibid.: 4). Identification, Hall argues, is a two-way process. It involves the “hailing” or “interpellation” (a term introduced by Althusser (1971)) of the subject in a position crafted by ideology or hegemonic social discourses. It also requires an investment in the position on the part of the subject.

Another theoretical perspective, that of positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) offers a promising direction for understanding the ways in which individuals navigate and appropriate subject positions in daily life, more precisely in the course of interpersonal discursive practice. People construct their selfhood, Davies and Harré argue, by continuously positioning themselves in various points of the discursive repertoires provided by their culture and by speaking from those positions in the course of their daily life. However:

[I]n speaking and acting from a position people are bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is, the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse. [...] such a being is not inevitably caught in the subject position that the particular narrative and the related discursive practices might seem to dictate (Davies and Harré 1990: 48).

This analysis of the processes and relationships that bind together the political, citizenship and identity offers a useful framework for my further investigation. This framework is constituted by several central propositions: First, citizenship is recognized as a complex and dynamic construct rather than as a monolithic, binary, on/off, either present or absent personal quality or type of activity. Second, subject positions of a political nature and the process of identification with them form the central axis along which citizenship is actively constructed by concrete individuals. Subsequent public expressions of such positions through participation in discourse or collective action depend and build on these underlying aspects of civic identity. Finally, acts of positioning, of self-identification with civic subject positions constructed in political and cultural discourses, the numerous smaller and bigger steps undertaken by individuals toward the consolidation, appropriation and modification of such positions should be placed at the heart of any investigation of citizenship. With such an entry point, I feel an empirical inquiry into the gestation and the lived experience of citizenship in the everyday becomes more manageable.

Subactivism: The Hidden Bedrock of the Political

Drawing on the politics and citizenship discussion presented so far, I would like to distinguish three levels at which citizenship can be perceived albeit in quite distinct forms. The first two include the level of formal institutional politics and that of subpolitics as defined by Beck (1997). Note that as much as Beck emphasizes forms and manifestations of politics located underneath the surface of formal institutions, his construct retains a strong public and activist element. What seems to count as subpolitics are the organized and/or publicly traceable initiatives of social movements and individuals finding themselves in strategic points of the social system. The third level which I believe should be added to a comprehensive model of citizenship lies deeper under the surface than that. It could be referred to as the level of *subactivism*. Subactivism is categorically sub-merged and sub-jective. Playing on Beck's outline of subpolitics, it can be described as small-scale, often individual decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and remain submerged in everyday life.

Characteristic of subactivism is that its locus is the private sphere or the small social world. It blends ethics and politics, or oscillates around the fuzzy boundary where one merges into the other as pointed out by Mouffe and Schmitt. It is constituted by numerous acts of positioning – often in the imaginary vis-à-vis large-scale political, moral and cultural confrontations, but also with respect to ongoing micro interactions and conversations. It is not about political power in the strict sense, but about personal empowerment seen as the power of the subject to be the person that they want to be in accordance with his or her reflexively chosen moral and political standards. Its frames of reference are fluid and constantly shifting influenced by the ongoing dialogue between the subject and the cultural discourses permeating his or her social environment. The decisions and actions that constitute it have no permanent place in a person's agenda. They arise spontaneously often as new dimensions of work, home-making, parenting, entertainment. Subactivism may or may not leak out of the small social world and become publicly visible, meaning that its acts and products although multiple, can remain confined to the private sphere. This, however, does not condemn subactivism to inconsequentiality. The potential for it to be mobilized by trigger events and transformed into overt public activism is always in place. It is that essential bedrock against which the potential for participation in subpolitics or in the formal political institutions of the public world is shaped and nurtured.

Subactivism is best understood if the analysis starts from the point where the thinking and acting subject immediately experiences her physical and social world. The most productive route for performing such an analysis is charted by theories of everyday life and the lifeworld.¹ Lefebvre, for example, (Lefebvre 1971; 1991) started his inquiry into the quotidian (everyday life) by distinguishing his approach from the preoccupation of philosophers and thinking people of his time with the political dramas acted out in "higher spheres" (Lefebvre 1991:

6), such as the State, parliament, or party policies. Lefebvre's interest focused on the "humble everyday base" (ibid.) of politics; in matters related to food, housing, rationing, wages, the organization and reorganization of labour. For him, everyday life was "what is left over after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by the analysis" (ibid.: 97). Among the numerous alienations plaguing everyday life, Lefebvre distinguished the alienation in political life, where the State takes on a power superior to the life of society. Traces of this kind of alienation can be sensed in the "I don't care about politics" retort by disenchanted citizens who have lost faith that anything they say or do can bring about any changes in the specialized and "superior" sphere of state politics.

Starting from a set of very different philosophical premises, Schutz sees the everyday lifeworld as "the region of reality in which man [*sic*] can engage himself and which he can change while he operates in it by means of his animate organism" (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 3). In this region man encounters other people (his "fellow men") with whom he communicatively constructs a shared world. These two features taken together make the everyday lifeworld "man's fundamental and paramount reality" (ibid.: 3). A detailed exploration of the social structures of this experienced reality leads Schutz to map out an interlocking range of "zones of anonymity". Between the immediately present "fellow-man" and the abstract images of highly anonymous social collectivities and institutions stretches a continuous scale of "social typifications" characterized by different "gradations of immediacy" (ibid.: 69): of people the individual has met, but later lost from sight; of people or groups about which she has heard first-person accounts from her friends; of people and groups that she knows about through myths and media; of social collectivities that she has been led to imagine indirectly and such that she finds hard to even envisage. The more remote and harder to reach and bring into immediate contact a social body is, the greater its degree of anonymity. In that sense, Schutz' notions of actual, potential, restorable and attainable reach hold particular importance in defining the capacity of the individual to come to know and get involved with the different personal and collective entities populating her social universe. Obviously, these entities include friends, relatives and family members as they do cultural and professional groups, politicians, parties, civic organizations, governments and nations. Communication media with different affordances and the use genres they engender help individuals traverse this continuum spanning the private and the public and establish social engagements infinitely variable in closeness, content and intensity. The internet has proven to be a particularly versatile vehicle for navigating the structures of the social world. I will try to demonstrate how this works with respect to young people and citizenship in the next section.

Young Internet Users and Subactivism

In what follows, I will interpret the data from two qualitative studies of internet use along the lines of the theoretical discussions and categories introduced above. The first study was conducted 2002-2003 in Calgary, Canada, one of the most densely networked cities in a highly connected country. Altogether the inhabitants of 74 households were interviewed in depth about the purposes and patterns of their daily internet use. The inquiry followed several different themes and included all members of the households that had agreed to participate. This provided for a multiple and varied non-probability sample of respondents and for rich data concerning numerous aspects of internet use in everyday life. In the overall sample of 74 households there were 38 families with young people between the age of 10 and 24. These young people were interviewed together with the family group as well as individually.

The second study was conducted in 2007-2008 and focused on the use practices associated with Web 2.0 applications such as blogs and social networking sites. Data were collected through focus groups of three to eight people, the sessions taking from two to three hours. Altogether 18 bloggers and 21 Facebook users participated in these sessions. The respondents were young adults from 19 to 35 years old. The bloggers formed the older set of this population, while most Facebook users were university students in their twenties. Participants in the Facebook focus groups knew each other and belonged to each other's lists of friends.

A question posed to respondents directly in the home-based study was whether they had used the internet for civic participation. Other questions probed more generally into respondents' perceptions of whether the internet extended their "possibilities for action in the world", and whether it made them feel "empowered". In many cases interviewers had to explain, or "operationalize", the phrase "civic participation" for the young participants so that they could get the meaning of the question. Depending on the age of the respondent and their own sense of the concept as well as the conversation thus far, interviewers suggested uses such as reading news on current events, community involvement, political information and action. Typically, the question did not produce particularly revealing answers. Interviewees either shrugged or laughed it off: "Oh, I could not care less about politics", replied Amy (19 years-old), while Kelly (22) found it humorous: "Civic participation? Oh, not that I know of [laughs]". For Martin (17) the question itself had to be decoded only to meet with an immediate denial:

Interviewer: OK. And then civic participation, that's like getting involved in the community and all that.

Martin: No, basically just talk with my friends.

Thus among the youth involved in these interviews civic consciousness in the sense of explicitly defining certain projects or activities related to the internet

as belonging to the political or civic spheres of action and concern was largely absent. At first glance, there were no signs of civic or political interests and engagements in these young people's internet uses. What they actually employed the internet for was about fun, chatting with friends, curiosity, fandom, games and sometimes plainly fighting boredom, findings consistent with those of Livingstone and Bober (2003):

Interviewer: Do you think it's important to have the internet at home, or it's just kind of fun?

Jeremy: It's important for some people, but what I use it for, it's just mostly for fun... Just more stuff to do in my spare time.

Alana: It keeps you more entertained and you are not as bored. I just talk to my friends more...

In the everyday lifeworlds of these teens of the early 2000s, the image of the internet as an exciting novelty has already worn off. It is a cool thing that one can be cool about. The medium has slipped into the position of an ordinary tool for achieving customary goals. All these goals belong to the common cultural practices of education, socialization, gaming and other forms of entertainment that characterize that particular stage of life. Nothing spectacular has happened, nothing transformative or revolutionary. Most teens agree that the internet has not changed their lives dramatically. They reinforce this point indirectly, but firmly by finishing their accounts or lists of activities they perform on the internet with the words: "nothing more than that" and "that's about it". Certainly, teens can also link up directly with the sites of their favourite celebrities, movies and games, which is another convenience at times of boredom.

In Schutzian terms, therefore, the experienced social world of these teens has expanded only very slightly. Their relationships with fellow-individuals (friends, relatives, etc.) have intensified and acquired different dynamics and formal elements. They can construe relationships across time and distance as easily restorable and attainable. However, the zones extending beyond this world of immediate intersubjective experiences have remained nearly as anonymous and insulated as before. I say nearly because some teens use the internet to position themselves as members of fan, hobbyist and gaming communities, which puts them in a more direct and respectively less anonymous interaction with these social collectivities. With one exception of a 16-year-old girl who had joined Amnesty International, in the set of data obtained from the 38 teens (12-18), there was no evidence of bridges being constructed or crossed between the everyday lifeworld of a teen and civic or political collectivities. To the extent that teens used the internet to identify themselves with social and cultural positions and practices, those were typically constricted to the realm of commercial entertainment and interpersonal sociability – game player, Harry Potter fan, band club member, best friend, etc. There were no sides of these positions and practices that could be seen as political even in the terms of

the very open and undemanding definition adopted in this analysis. This was generally true about the data garnered from the older 19-24 years group also with some notable exceptions to be discussed later.

So then if the civic and the political are so conspicuously absent from the internet use accounts of the young people studied, should it be concluded that young citizenship is impossible to cultivate by the powers of this medium? This certainly would be a reasonable inference based on the evidence examined so far. Before I declare the cause lost, however, I will try out another strategy: I will revisit the data, this time looking not for the most common and typical uses reported by teens, but for what I will call “openings”, that is, instances no matter how brief and rare, in which the world of the civic and the political has connected with the everyday lifeworlds of young people with the help of the internet. Consequently, I will inquire into the circumstances producing such instances and what can be learned from them. Such an approach would be consistent with the “critique of everyday life” proposed by Lefebvre (1991), a critique of the real with the possible seeking to discern among the typical practices aligned with the ideologies of a commercial leisure and alienation from political life, the elements of the “life-enhancing”, or transformative possibilities.

School Projects and Civic Issues

It could be noticed in the data that using the internet for research in relation to school projects was a “use genre” (Bakardjieva 2005), widely practiced and even enjoyed by teens. On several occasions, admittedly under insistent questioning on the part of interviewers, teens offered a more detailed elaboration of what exactly they had looked for and from what sources.

Interviewer: And then when you are in school do you use it for research?

Martin: Yeah.

Interviewer: So you'd be looking for something specifically?

Martin: Hmm, specific, like it depends what topic I'd be doing. Like, lately the last project that I did at the end of the year was in social with religious tolerance like religious beliefs and human rights conflicting with each other... Um, well, if I go through a web-page or something that I know will be truthful, like I did use stuff like, I go to Human Rights Watch and like Amnesty International and I trust the information on there 'cus I was pretty sure it'd be fact, like they'd be putting fact on there.

Interviewer: OK so, how internet has improved your chances to be informed?

Almaz: Oh yeah, it has helped because it's another medium of information that you can access. It's another one right in your face. I could only know what's going on in the world only through TV or newspaper otherwise. I could give you an example, like for my Social Action project I wanted to

do stuff on Middle East, like all the latest information. Now, Calgary Herald doesn't have everything on Middle East, CNN doesn't show everything on Middle East. But cnn.com and bbc.com have really good sections on Middle East, like the history and what's going on over there. What went on during the Cold War and what could happen like what's in store for the Middle East. Like all that you know. There's a lot like you can access a lot of things on the internet.

Although the issues examined in the projects these students talk about are formally assigned to them through school, the actual pursuit of information and understanding that they require puts the young researchers on the path of source selection and evaluation as well as critical interpretation of the evidence gleaned from different sources. Apart from the most obvious media sites, alternative sources such as civic and political organizations come to be seen as equally accessible and authoritative suppliers of information, perspectives and positions. This is a move away from the mainstream "objective" reporting agencies and toward the kind of players in the online information field that openly espouse positions. The diverse list of media available on the internet also invites selectivity and awareness to nuance, comparison and contrast. These activities afforded by the internet, but set into motion by a particular educational methodology and practice, lead to the achievement of a basic degree of political literacy, which as Dahlgren (2003) has argued is an essential component of civic culture.

In the typical case of an assigned school project, the exploration of the social and political issues is undertaken with the goals characteristic of "social studies" as an academic subject. Thus neutral knowledge, not civic initiation, is the explicitly sought end result. Thrown into the multivoicedness of the new media environment, however, students encounter passionate and opinionated accounts speaking from a wide variety of positions. The challenge and invitation to take a position is therefore implicitly present in this kind of school exercise. The question to educators would be whether the new media affordances should not be harnessed by a novel pedagogy of position-taking. Unlike indoctrination, this kind of pedagogy could encourage students to identify with positions on the basis of the pluralist knowledge gleaned from the various media they traverse. It would also suggest ways of enacting these positions through the spectrum of practices available in the real, as opposed to the academically constructed, political world.

Citizenship Openings in Blogging and Facebook

Focus group discussions that we conducted in 2007-2008 with bloggers and users of Facebook helped us trace the extension of citizenship practices into the new configuration of affordances provided by Web 2.0. In terms of generation, it can be argued that the young adults who are the practitioners of blogging and social networking are largely the teenagers who used the internet for fun

and the occasional school project in the early 2000s. Needless to say, most of blogging and social networking are done for entertainment and frivolous socializing too. Nevertheless, civic openings present themselves amidst these private, interpersonal and fun-oriented activities. Asked whether a blogger is a more engaged citizen than the average person, the participants in one of our focus groups started a heated debate some denying this proposition and others creatively searching for those aspects of blogging that may in some cases qualify as civic engagement. According to one respondent, Simon, 28, his blog offers a space where he can feel free to address controversial political issues which would normally be avoided in everyday socializing:

Simon: What I've also noticed is that... I get a chance to address issues I maybe wouldn't in public with other people. For example when I'm at a party and everybody's trying to make nice and you always hear those things you don't want to talk about [are] religion and politics. Everybody's got their own opinion and it starts an argument.

By silencing himself on question of politics in his everyday encounters, Simon feels that his civic sense is being suppressed and marginalized. The blog allows him to take up political issues head on without fear that he might offend someone's feelings or ruin the party with an unwanted bitter argument. Thus he has the chance to align himself with civic positions and concerns by writing in his blog. For another blogger, Jordan, 31, the blog serves not only as a platform for expressing positions already held. It has turned into a catalyst of engaging and identifying with such positions for the simple reason that in order to comment on some current development a blogger first has to be informed, and then also to come up with his or her own view of it:

Jordan: I think I am more civically minded because of it. I wrote about the university elections, which I wouldn't have even bothered to read all of the candidates little bios unless I was writing about it, and because I was writing about it, I learned about what each of the candidates thought...

Doubt and scepticism regarding the civic quality of blogging were also voiced by participants in the group. The blogging versus "doing something" dichotomy came to vex the discussants and prevented a clear consensus on the civic potential of blogging to be reached.

Roger: Like nothing is really gonna happen because everybody is just kind of talking about that. The Net provides pretty safe atmosphere where, like, I go to a lot of human rights blogs where there is these people, you know, talking about Lebanon, talking about Sudan, talking about whatever, but its like none of them are really doing anything. [...] I am an activist blogger, I don't know if that necessarily translates into ... Just writing about it, I don't know if that makes a difference.

This dichotomy reiterates in a condensed form and in the plane of everyday consciousness the controversies plaguing the theoretical definitions of citizenship and politics discussed earlier in this chapter. If politics and citizenship are exclusively defined by direct involvement in events designated as political and performed in the commonly recognized institutional or subinstitutional realm of politics, then a blogger's writing out his or her own views on social and political issues is a politically irrelevant, even if self-soothing gesture. If, however, the notion of subactivism and its processes and practices are taken into account, then taking a standpoint on social and political issues in a quasi public space is tantamount to political and civic identification, to placing oneself into the tension field marked by the "we versus they" divide. Moreover, it is a personal act of appropriating and negotiating the positions offered by public discourses as theorized by Davies and Harré (1990). Interestingly, blogging occupies a midway space between the macro level public discourses where subject positions are authoritatively offered and the micro level interpersonal discourses, in which subjects typically reiterate, negotiate and transform such positions based on their individual history, experience and situations. Blogging emerges as a meso level discourse to the extent that its messages spill out of the narrow interpersonal circle of their authors and at least potentially become available to a large anonymous audience. Some of the bloggers in our focus groups had the clear consciousness of their role as position-brokers in a larger public world:

Steven: It's out there so anybody can read it you know, so maybe don't be afraid to say what you want to say. That's how I've improved as a person I think... I think the (unknown) is there and once you release it, it's out there for people to see and maybe makes you take a stand and makes you say I believe this and I'm going to support it with what I think is right... I think I'm forced, I force myself to kind of take a stand and kind of, here's my opinion, and if I have to defend it, then I'll defend it and if I want to have a general dialogue, then that's great too.

Theo: I think that when you voice your opinion, if you are not voicing your opinion no one will hear it. So I think that writing about it can actually do something and it can cause momentum for change... but if you actually state what you believe in ... then you encourage dialogue. I think it can really get people thinking and we do live in a democracy so things can be changed that way.

With its tremendous diversity of content and style, blogging cannot be construed as a form of civic or political engagement per se. However, by virtue of the fact that it affords and facilitates the process of identification with, negotiation and transformation of subject positions, it lends itself to political and civic uses. It becomes a tool of self-identification that enables the individual to construct his or her Self in a constant dialogue with cultural and political discourses as well as with fellow-men and women.

While blogging constitutes a one-to-many mode of expression in which under certain circumstances people espouse and negotiate subject positions in front of a more or less anonymous audience, social networking sites are distinguished by a much higher degree of interactivity and two-way communication with audience members. In as much as social networking sites such as Facebook are used for the identification with civic and political subject positions, *the interpersonal* stands a real chance of becoming political and vice versa. These sites allow direct links to be drawn between anonymous entities (a charity organization, a social movement, a political party) and abstract ideas on the one hand, and personally known people and groups, concrete daily actions and choices on the other. At first going, the question whether Facebook can be or has been used for civic and political purposes by our focus group participants met with resistance: “Facebook is a personal thing and I don’t want politicians there – in my face. Politics does not belong there...” (Erin).

Erin went on to explain how her “befriending” of a Canadian politician on Facebook had been immediately co-opted in the propaganda machine of the respective party through different statements that appeared on her profile without her authorization. This categorical stance, however, was soon softened and qualified as the discussion was steered away from the traditional formal understanding of politics.

George: Facebook is about the grassroots. When politicians get involved, it becomes top down... But if Laura [friend] puts a political issue on her page, I’d be interested in that...

Laura was certainly the activist in the group of young adults we had invited for the discussion. Her environmental convictions and self-identification with a variety of political and social causes and movements were clearly reflected on her Facebook profile. Her large network of Facebook friends were the first to hear about initiatives, boycotts and petitions that she was receiving through various channels, including the Facebook groups she belonged to. This mutual civic and political initiation among friends came up multiple times in stories recounted by other participants as well:

Aurel: I have a friend who is putting together a petition about the situation in Uganda, and Facebook is really huge for that as he can create a group for it and he can invite a lot of people to that... It is just really just getting started, [it] doesn’t even have a group yet, but my friend messaged me about how they can get more popularity with it and that’s something I would be interested in joining. And here on campus for the student elections candidates would set up a “vote for me” kind of group stating all the political reasons why people should vote for them...

If we read statements like that with a view to Schutz’ structure of the social world, a fascinating movement between the anonymous and the closely fa-

miliar reveals itself. Facebook makes it possible for political and civic bodies and concerns to become part of the everyday world of these young people. It brings these bodies and concerns into “the region of reality in which man [*sic*] can engage himself and which he can change while he operates in it by means of his animate organism” (Schutz and Luckmann 1973: 3). The changes in question may be miniscule: a small amount raised for cancer research, a couple of friends notified of a political event, a number of signatures gathered under a petition. They, however, mark a clear opening for the interpersonal connections between and among fellow-persons to acquire a political direction and charge. The question still remains as to whether these virtual appeals do as good a job as their face-to-face counterparts:

Jeffrey: I joined a group that is supporting the monks’ protest in Burma. I joined that just to make a statement. My friends would see that I joined it... may be they will know that it existed. Because lots of people didn’t even know what was happening until that giant protest [broke out]. Many people still don’t know what is happening, which is very disappointing... I have much more of an impact on people when I rant in person, in conversations. I am a very political person.

The fact is though, that while Jeffrey carries his identity as a political person and activist openly and outspokenly, others remain at the submerged and subjective level of subactivism. For them the unobtrusive tools of virtual social networking introduce new ways to take a position and state it, to engage and inspire others in a soft and personal way.

Far from being predominantly used for civic and political purposes, Facebook, as indicated by the uses described by our focus group participants, offers possibilities for civic engagement. Will these possibilities, or as I have referred to them, openings, be creatively and widely taken up by young people? Will a civic and political culture arise around social networking sites? While the arrival of “participatory culture” has been proclaimed in the context of fan-ship, gaming and music (Jenkins 2005), it is yet to make itself at home in the realm of politics. As one of our discussants noted, Facebook, and social networking sites in general, are about the grassroots. So their future applications will be decided by the user grassroots before anyone else. Formal political entities and professional politicians, for their part, could have hard time figuring out ways of overcoming the perceived privacy and personal nature of social networking. Thus, it is still too early to declare social networking sites to be the next arena where political and civic issues will be played out. On the basis of the exploratory research presented here, the one claim that can be made with certainty is that these online communicative platforms promise to make the workings of subactivism more tangible and shared. Through the tiny gestures of fellow men and women, they help thrust politics into the heart of the everyday lifeworld of their users. They make civic identification easier to perform and harder to avoid in the context of viral position dissemination and peer example.

Conclusion

In light of the theory and empirical material discussed in this chapter, what answer can be given to the question raised in the beginning namely: Has the internet's potential as a mundane tool of citizenship been fully and imaginatively explored and tested? While cold statistics register no signs of a participatory revolution among young citizens, there definitely is something bubbling up underground at the level of subactivism and the internet seems to be an important meeting place of numerous unglamorous practices of civic identification and engagement. The lessons that follow from this observation can be spelled out in terms of social theory on the one hand, and political action, on the other.

Where social analysts have expected a lively exchange between citizens and public and political institutions to be precipitated by the internet, one finds mostly top-down provider-client relations facilitated by the various versions of e-government platforms. Youth is categorically not inspired by these opportunities and largely ignores them. Subpolitical agents such as social movements and civic organizations have made good use of the internet in managing their own affairs and connecting their activists, however, they have not seen substantive surge in the number of young participants. Finally, what I have called subactivism on the part of young internet users has been an insulated phenomenon without much consequence for the growth of civic participation on a larger scale. Thus the democratic potential of the internet may not lie at any of these levels taken separately, but in the possibility for their interweaving. My insistence in this chapter has been that subactivism has to be recognized as an important dimension of democracy which calls to be connected with the subpolitical and strictly political strata populated by collectives, organizations and institutions through proper bridges.

For political and civic actors this means that instead of waiting for the internet bandwagon to deliver to them enthusiastic young participants, concentrated efforts have to be made to study and come to understand the daily practices of subactivism involving the internet. Only with a thorough understanding of the workings of subactivism and its manifestations in the ever changing online environment can honest and effective strategies for involving young people be designed. A critical moment where offerings from political and civic organizations can be brought to bear on young citizenship is that of self-identification and positioning – a process much more vibrant among youth than any other age group. Political actors need realistic insight into how identification with subject positions of civic and political nature occurs in the daily life of young people in the midst of their educational activities, entertainment and peer group interaction. Certainly, the cultivation of young citizens is not and cannot be a top-down process. A grassroots participatory culture in the realm of citizenship and politics has to be engendered by socially conscious young people themselves and the tools for that have already arrived. What remains to be carefully studied is under what conditions and in combination with what factors young people actually take up these tools as citizens.

Note

1. For a more detailed discussion of theories of everyday life and their relevance to Internet studies, see Bakardjieva (2005).

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Chapter 8

Everyday Life and the Internet in Diaspora Families

Girls Tell their Stories

Ingegerd Rydin & Ulrika Sjöberg

The metaphor of “flows” has come to symbolise not only global and transnational media but also population movements worldwide. It implies that migration is a continuous and ongoing process across multiple borders in contrast to such ideas as the nation-state, nationalism and national culture. Instead, migration of today has implications on issues related to citizenship beyond national borders. Consequently, according to Cohen (1997), a migrant may have multiple belongings and the term diaspora finds its heuristic value referring to groups who are not living in their homeland, but closely linked to their original homeland or to their imagined homeland, sometimes in mediated form: “In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared imagination” (Cohen 1997: 26).

In this chapter five young teen-age girls tell their stories with the aim to deepen our understanding of how girls from diaspora families position themselves in their everyday social encounters. In these stories special attention is placed on the girls’ internet practices. The cases, drawn from the project *Media practices in the new country*¹, will hopefully shed light on how young girls change their identity positions depending on context, often related to their perception of “their homeland” and how the internet works as a mediating factor in this process. Their stories will also show how issues of identity and their specific internet use have strong links to citizenship as well as participation in everyday life.

Identity and Citizenship

Within the social sciences, citizenship is normally seen in a broader sense and includes such things as cultural, social and religious identities (Westin 2003) as well as informal and formal participation in the public and private sphere. We join in on the exploration of the concept of identity made by Westin (2003: 174), who claimed that

...theoretically, the identity concept enables us to co-ordinate a large number of seemingly different phenomena studied by widely disparate fields of scholarship. Its popularity is due to the fact that it covers a wide field of human experience, ranging from the deepest emotions and memories of the self, over social interaction in everyday life situations, entailing self conceptions and attributions made by others that are communicated, negotiated and modified, to the categorizations of broad social, class-bound, religious, cultural and ethnic collectives.

Westin (2003: 174) continued, stating that "...the popularity of the concept and its suggestive potential harks back to the fact that it relates to central existential dimensions of the human condition." Furthermore, he claimed that the concept of identity is politically important for many reasons, for example, the quest for identity may be seen as the reason why minority groups assert their distinctiveness and try to gain recognition. The issue of identity has therefore become central in thinking about the process of cultural transformation within an increasingly "global post-modern" society (Hall 1996), where people negotiate their identities between continuity and change, between similarity and difference, i.e. in a process of cultural change. Many youngsters are not only involved in shifting identifications, but in enacting a hybrid identity that draws on an increasing number of global sources (cf. Sinclair and Cunningham 2001). But the concept of identity has also been criticized. Anthias (2002) argued, for example, that the term has rather limited heuristic value and advocated the notion of narratives of location and positionality to understand the meaning of collective identity. "Such a position is able to pay attention to spatial and contextual dimensions, treating the issues involved in terms of processes rather than possessive properties of individuals..." (Anthias 2002: 494). The project *Media practices in the New Country* applies a contextual perspective in an attempt to gain knowledge about issues related to, for instance, culture, identity, exclusion/inclusion in society and media use. The project asserts the need to look at the relational nature of identity processes, which are experienced and performed within various social, cultural, political and historical contexts (cf. Madianou 2005). This is further stressed by Stier (2004: 99) who discussed the notion that a person's identity is also partly constructed by how other people perceive him or her (2004: 99): "Differentiation between groups occurs on both sides of the socially constructed border. Groups are assigned identities, some of which may be viewed as more desirable and of higher status than others are" (our translation).

The discussion above clearly demonstrates the link between issues of identity and citizenship. In everyday life "doing citizenship" (Dahlgren 2006) is closely connected to a person's perception of his or her identities as e.g. "Swedes", "migrants", "foreigners" etc., or vice versa, how the person's is assigned (by others) one or the other of these categories. Moreover, globalization, e.g. migration movements, has changed the expectations of what citizenship actually means. Processes of globalization are diminishing the bonding power of the

nation-state in favour of newer, transnational forms of community building, claimed Turner (1994 in Hermes 2006: 300). Turner defined citizenship as competent membership in a community, which includes the appreciation of shared codes, commitments, competences and possibly a canon as well. In other words, he advocates a rather broad definition which may include even people lacking citizenship status in legal terms.

Citizenship and Participation in Mediated Everyday Life

“Discussion about what is best for all of us is understood to be supported by and take place predominantly in (news) media. Journalism functions as democracy’s watchdog and as a mediator for citizenship” (Hermes 2006: 205). But at the same time, in today’s media-saturated society, with increased access to different media (e.g. minority, transnational, national and local media), claims are also made that democracy may be under threat and that multicultural civil society tends to be fragmented into “media ghettos” (Bailey and Harindranath 2006). In line with the commercialization of news media, and media content in general, and in relation to changes in people’s media practices, one can see that new forms of citizenship are being added to the old ones. There are, for example, other forms of participation than the traditional, especially in the time of the internet. Citizenship then can be found both above ground and parliamentary politics, as the “...daily fealty to the corporate capitalist state”, and as the “underground” reflection on what binds us, what we expect from life and what we are critical of (Hermes and Dahlgren 2006: 260 quoting Toby Miller 1998). In an earlier work, Miller (1993: 223) was more cynical and concluded that: “...the civic cultural subject – the citizen – is produced as a polite and obedient servant of etiquette, within limited definitions of acceptable behaviour”. However, in order to overcome such behaviour, we need to broaden and deepen our understanding of what citizenship means in contemporary society. Couldry (2006) agreed and urged us to study the “culture” of citizenship, emphasizing the need to explore what it actually feels like to be a citizen. This implies building a bridge between informal and formal aspects of citizenship and looking beyond the public sphere itself, into the realm of the private and the experiential domain of everyday life.

Still, the traditional forms of citizenship will not be abandoned, or as Buckingham (2000: 186) put it: “There may indeed be a case for redefining politics, or of changing dominant forms of political culture, but “politics as usual” will continue to exercise a fundamental influence on people’s lived experiences...” Groups of people, especially young people, do not always favour the traditional views on what citizenship means. And minority groups, even those with full citizenship in legal terms, may be alienated from the Swedish political system. In the last parliamentary election (2006), a significant portion of citizens with an immigrant background did not vote, which some would consider a threat to our democratic society (Statistics Sweden 2007). Most agree that such a lack

of participation in the democratic process is related to marginalization, ethnic discrimination in the job market and Swedish immigration politics. Furthermore, there is a significant risk that adults' marginalization will be passed on to and influence their children (cf. Dahlstedt 2002).

Previous research has also shown that young people's alienation and cynical attitudes towards politicians and politics are not due to ignorance, but to the fact that they are often excluded from political activities and the political agenda (Loader 2007). Young people's need to explore their political self on their own terms has been increasingly stressed among researchers, and Buckingham (2000) observed that we have to merge the personal and the political. However, studies of young people's participation in society and the civic sphere as well as the meanings of citizenship for younger children are rather limited (Dahlgren 2007). For example, young people's popular culture and their own cultural expressions may sometimes take the form of very straight political statements such as composition rap lyrics (de Block and Rydin 2006). But there are still few studies of that kind.

In the project *Media practices in the New Country*, everyday life and the private sphere set the point of departure for understanding people's media use and their interaction with the surrounding society. "The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is rather a world that originates in "thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these" (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 33). The taken for granted, the intersubjective (shared with others) and the ordered (both spatially and temporally) are features of everyday life, originates in people's language, thoughts, and actions. Everyday behaviour and thoughts create routines and rituals, thereby providing us with what Giddens (1991: 44) would call ontological security. Thus, everyday life is the dominant site for various identity processes and for making sense of the world.

In a study by Hof (2006), an internet forum on scrapbook-making, an activity mostly done by women, was analysed and discussed as an interpretative community and labelled as an instance of cultural citizenship. Hof stated: "Citizenship comes by way of scrapbooking as it offers a very visible form and forum through which scrappers show what and whom they care about, how they live and where they fit into society at large" (Hof 2006: 364). In this study, "...scrappers may be seen as a citizenry which obliges itself to various duties within discourses and depictions of the contemporary western woman, while enjoying the popular privileges accompanying modes of identities that are self-consciously communal, capitalist and, above all, gendered" (2006: 367-368). If scrapbook-making is an instance of doing cultural citizenship, we should also include other kinds of everyday activities and other groups, such as children surfing on the internet as an instance of cultural citizenship. Here they can raise their voices and make themselves heard as well as negotiating their opinions with others.

The Child as Citizen – A Matter of Competence, Being and Becoming

An important contribution in the discussion on children as citizen comes from the research approach called “sociology of childhood” (James and Prout 1990), which deals with issues concerning children as citizens in terms of their human rights and children’s competencies to participate and influence their everyday life in school and in society. An important turn has been made from perceiving children as “human becomings” to “human beings” (Qvortrup et al. 1994). “The notion of children as independent individual citizens with democratic rights in many ways represents a qualitatively new perspective on childhood” (Kjørholt 2001: 68). A historical milestone in this context was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (from 1989). While discussions about children’s participation have evolved a great deal around the public sphere, researchers are increasingly turning their attention to the private sphere and to what citizenship means in children’s and young people’s own terms (see, e.g., Buckingham 2000). From a Swedish perspective, the issue of citizenship in childhood research has long been on the political agenda. Not only does citizenship mean legal rights and duties, but the notion of citizenship is also related to behaviour and manners. Individuals have to be taught to be “good citizens”. Compulsory schooling is of course the most important tool in fostering informed and good citizens. But citizenship education was also a topic in the early days of public service radio. Adults, as well as children and young people, were given “lessons” in citizenship, i.e. how to become a “good citizen”. This could involve teaching good manners such as politeness, for instance, how to behave towards elderly people on the bus. But it could also involve “lessons” related to such things as health promotion and good taste in interior decorating (Rydin 2000). Later on, television took this role. It was the canon of the “knowledge class” (Hartley 1999), i.e. professionals who guarded their territory and defined legitimate taste for the masses. This was the time when discourses about children and young people had paternalistic overtones. The discourse of citizenship is thus related to competence. The young should be taught to become competent citizens and to manage everyday life in modern society. However, discourses about children and young people have changed, and today we see a twist towards lifting up the child’s competence in their own terms, rather than underestimating it. What is stressed today is that children already are competent (Brembeck, Johansson and Kampmann 2004) and in everyday rhetoric they are sometimes called “our young citizens”, even as toddlers. Within the sociology of childhood tradition, society or school has been accused of underestimating the capacities of the young. Instead, it is stressed that they develop competencies informally merely by participating in various social settings, such as peer groups, or by using the media. They are active agents and develop the competence they need in the context they are situated in, emphasizing the relational character of the concept. In the Nordic countries, the issue of civic engagement and participation has also included a discussion on how to stimulate the active agency and involve-

ment of children and young people (cf. Brembeck et al. 2004). Various kinds of democracy projects, more or less formal, have been initiated to promote participation and guide children and young people towards self-decision in matters that are affecting them (Kjørholt and Lidén 2004). However, many of these initiatives originate from the schools or the local municipality and not from the children themselves.

In media studies, the idea of the participating and competent child is seen in today's much more child-centred approach (Livingstone 1998). Livingstone (1998: 441) noted that, with this approach, children and young people "Not only respond but also influence changes in their immediate environment, including their mediated environment." As regards the new communications media, children are often seen as more competent than adults, and expressions such as the electronic or digital generation are used. Buckingham (2000: 41) stated "Far from being passive victims of the media, children are seen here to possess a powerful form of 'media literacy' [...] new media technologies are seen to provide children with new opportunities for creativity, for community and for self-fulfilment." Researchers and politicians are showing increased interest in the role of media among young migrants and one of these examples is the project CHICAM² (Children in communication about migration). Media clubs were set up to give young migrants in six European countries a "voice" and to promote communication via the internet between young people living under similar conditions. By sending videos, letters and collages, they were encouraged to speak publicly about their personal situation in their new countries of living (Italy, Greece, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and the U.K.) with the aim to affect migration policies.

In the following, the five girls Dimitra, Yasmine, Iman, Nadia and Mai (12 to 16 years of age) will speak for themselves about their lives in Sweden and about how they look upon themselves as migrants. By means of the media, they are "doing citizenship", as Dahlgren (2006) said. He stressed that "Civil society can serve as training ground that 'grooms' citizens, preparing them for civic participation and political engagement" (2006: 272). In order to see what the acculturation process looks like, we need: "to go beyond institutionalized structures and dynamics" (2006: 272) and look more closely at what is going on in people's everyday lives. That can be done by studies of "talk" (Dahlgren, 2006) and the dialogues in chat rooms and e-mails constitute such talk. Here we can observe the "...dynamic and open-ended and reflexive" (2006: 279) thoughts of young people with a specific focus on issues concerning national, ethnic and religious identity. The internet serves as a mediated space between their country of origin or their parents' homeland and Sweden – a space for negotiating their identities. The present focus is on the communicative functions in these girls' talk about their internet use rather than on information seeking related to schoolwork, etc.

“Thessaloniki, That’s Where I am From”

Dimitra had been in Sweden for five years when the researcher (interviewer) met her for the first time. Her parents had moved to Sweden in order to work, and they now had their own coffee shop. According to Dimitra, they only spoke Greek at home and watched only Greek television. The interview took place in Dimitra’s room, which she shared with her older sister. The computer was placed in the centre of the room, and Dimitra said it was very important to her, as she liked to be “constantly” on-line. Her sister also had a laptop. Dimitra was one of the few young informants in our project who came to Sweden at an older age (11 years old). She told us that she had no plans to stay forever and talked about herself as a visitor. Her views reflected her family situation. Her parents preferred to work in Sweden, and they also preferred the Swedish educational system for their children, but they spent their holidays in Greece. The fact that the informants had their own apartment in the homeland also affected their relation to that place both as a mental and a mediated space (Sjöberg 2008). As we will see, when the parents had an apartment or house in their former homeland, the internet served as a link that allowed the girls to maintain contact with friends and relatives and that kept them updated on current events. But because of, for example, civil war or for economic reasons, this was not an option for all families, and for the girls in this chapter, the internet helped them practice their religion and gain knowledge about their country of origin or chat with peers in Sweden who have a similar immigrant background. Dimitra declared how she enjoyed going to Greece every summer and at Christmas to see relatives and friends. Her parents’ decision to move to Sweden was not appreciated by Dimitra and her sister. The girls found it difficult to learn a new language and to establish new friendships. Now, after five years, she liked the school and the country, but she emphasized that her roots and her future belonged in Greece. That’s where her home is.

The interview with Dimitra illustrates a situation in which the individual is shifting subject positions between “here” and “there”. These persons live in a constant cultural transition, where “comparing” becomes an essential part of everyday life. Before their children were born, the parents had also lived a transnational life and had moved between the two countries several times. Dimitra has a clear opinion about the differences between Swedes and Greeks, i.e. their ethnic or national identities: “Greeks are completely different people than Swedes”, whereas “Swedes are quiet and calm. We are, Greeks I mean, always yelling and open and talking and laughing and all”. The discourses “we and you” as well as “here and there” were dominant throughout the interview.

Dimitra’s social and ethnic identities were linked to Greece and she said: “I just feel like a guest here, I’ll be here a while.” Internet was used as mediator to keep track of what is going on “there”, particularly when Dimitra was chatting with her friends and younger cousins. In other words, her social engagement was addressed to friends and relatives in Greece. Using *MSN* (with text, microphone and camera), she could have a virtual dialogue with her friends.

Like many other young informants in the project, she also frequently used *Lunarstorm*³ for her social network in Sweden. Although the young informants in the project had Swedish friends, it was common to also have friends from different cultural, national and religious backgrounds. Below Dimitra discusses her use of *Lunarstorm* and *MSN*:

Interviewer: The fact that you're online and chatting and talking with your friends, can you tell me a bit about this?

Dimitra: Well, I'm mostly on *MSN*, all my fiends have it, that is friends from school and some in Greece too, my cousins and others.

Interviewer: Where do they live in Greece?

Dimitra: In Thessaloniki, that's where I come from. I'm also on Lunar [*Lunarstorm*].

Interviewer: Tell me, is it primarily your cousins that you, are they your age or older, younger?

Dimitra: There's my cousin, she's 22, she's a girl who has *MSN* but I usually talk to my cousin, he's my age, a guy, he's 16 so he's the one I usually talk to.

Interviewer: Do your cousins also have internet access at home, or do they go to an internet café?

Dimitra: They have it at home.

Interviewer: You say you use *MSN* most with your Greek cousins, but your friends in Thessaloniki or is it mostly your cousins?

Dimitra: Well I have my cousins and *MSN* and then I have my best friend, a girl, she also lives there, she lives next door.

[...]

Interviewer: How often do you chat with your cousins, is it more like you log in to *MSN* and chat or is it more like you're doing schoolwork and you see that someone is online, how does it work?

Dimitra: I usually come home after school and then I sit at my computer and I have it on all day so they come in and then I talk to them but there's nothing set like "be online then" or so. I usually chat with the people who are online.

Interviewer: What do you talk about?

Dimitra: When it's my cousin, the girl, then we usually talk a bit about fashion, maybe guys then with my other cousin maybe we talk about what I usually do here, what he usually does and stuff.

Interviewer: And your friend who lives next door?

Dimitra: She usually tells me about fashion too, clothes and things, what's happened at school.

Interviewer: Is it important to you, chatting with your cousins and your friend?

Dimitra: Yeah, it's fun knowing how they are there, what it looks like now so I like know when I'm going there in the summer so I know what it's like there and things.

Even if Dimitra strongly emphasized her Greek identity, she also belonged to the Swedish local community, i.e. school and her mates there. When school was over, another space was opened and internet took over the dialogue with her schoolmates from Sweden (by use of *MSN* and *Lunarstorm*), but more importantly, her Greek friends were now invited. She was apparently constantly on-line through *MSN*. She described in detail her chats with Greek friends and relatives, which indicated that she was anxious to confirm her ethnic identity. She had to be updated on the youth culture, such as fashion, in order to keep up with the Greek way of life. Like the other girls in this chapter, the need to be updated and to chat in one's mother language is stressed. Overall, Dimitra's public and private space was geared towards the interests and needs of the group "Greeks", emphasizing the need for "collective group identity-formation" (Dahlgren 2006: 274) with regard to being a Greek.

"It's Very Difficult to Understand Arabic Newspapers"

The next example is drawn from interviews with a family who had three daughters, one of whom, Yasmine, twelve years old, was interviewed in more depth. She was the youngest sister of the three. The parents came originally from Syria, and the father was of Palestinian decent. The father first came to Sweden to study at the university, and he met his wife who was on holiday. Yasmine and her sisters were born in Sweden and had lived there their entire life. Yasmine and her family were Muslims, and the norms and values of Islam were important to follow. Even if they did not pray on a daily basis, the sisters said that they turned to Allah when they had problems. Otherwise, the family lived according to the norms of a Western modern lifestyle. Furthermore, the parents were highly educated and worked as a teacher and interpreter.

They mixed both Swedish and Arabic in the home, but the parents preferred that they all spoke Arabic. The parents encouraged their daughters to watch Arabic (also Swedish) news together and to be updated on events in the Middle East. In this way, the parents could explain difficult words or dialects to the children. It also became a way to discuss crucial social and political events in the Arabic world among the whole family on a daily basis. Both parents stressed the need to read or watch news, and they themselves read several Swedish and Arabic newspapers. Similar encouragement to read news on the internet was not seen. The older sisters read the local newspaper and different evening papers on a daily basis. Yasmine, the youngest, might take a look at *Aftonbladet* (Swedish tabloid) on the Net, but this did not occur so frequently. The internet was also used to search for information, e.g. for schoolwork or for finding musical entertainment. They downloaded music (mainly American

and Arabic) from the site *Mazzika*. However, they avoided news information in Arabic, at least in print, whereas television was preferred often assisted by their parents' translations and interpretations:

Interviewer: I thought then, considering the Middle East and Syria, do you read any specific Arabic newspapers?

Sabar: No.

Amber: No.

Yasmine: No.

Interviewer: Is there any particular reason for why you don't?

Sabar: Because it's really difficult, the Arabic in the newspapers. It's not everyday language.

Amber: Uh huh.

Interviewer: A lot of factual terms and such maybe.

Sabar: Exactly. Yeah, it's like, what's it called (says something in Arabic) in Swedish?

Interviewer: Like standard Swedish.

Sabar: Right, it's not like everyday language like when you talk. It's something else.

Interviewer: Then how do you find out about what's happening in Syria?

Sabar: We sit with our parents and they explain.

Interviewer: Then TV is an important medium?

Sabar: Yes.

Yasmine: Yes.

Amber: Yes.

At one point, the conversation developed around the concepts of "longing" and "belonging". The family made regular visits to their parents' homeland Syria, where the family had an apartment. One of the sisters said: "It's interesting to see all your family. Get some warmth and but what's most important is seeing your family, of course. Definitely." But the girls basically perceived Sweden as their home. Still Yasmine reflected that she could think of moving to Syria: "Maybe not right now, but when I'm a little older." Her sisters were of the same opinion, but might consider it after their university studies were completed, perhaps "Start a business or something". However, when asked about their reason for starting a business in Syria, it turned out to be purely commercial. Thus, they had mixed feelings about whether or not they would live in Syria in the future. And they also expressed some ambivalence about their ethnic identity: "It's natural but you don't really know where you belong because when you're here in Sweden, you feeling 100% Swedish, we are Swedes but also not, do you understand. Our appearance maybe..." And when they were

in Syria, they longed for Sweden and their life there. They saw themselves as something “between”, but Sweden was perceived more as their home as they had spent most of their time here. Thus, again the importance of locality was evident. Language is a marker for belonging and captures cultural, emotional and social ties to a group. Being a full member of a community requires the same language. Yasmine’s parents were anxious to keep the Arabic language (all parents in the project emphasized the importance of their children knowing their mother language) alive within the family, but she herself stressed that she had difficulties understanding Arabic. (This was very common among the young informants in our project.) Yasmine took home language lessons in school and also privately on Saturdays. She, herself, expressed some ambivalence regarding language preferences. Swedish was easier for her and her sisters than Arabic was: “But Swedish is easier to understand. Maybe you’re in Syria and talk to your cousins and maybe you don’t understand everything, it’s like that sometimes.”

Internet was frequently used by the three sisters, mostly chatting on *MSN*. They kept in touch with their Swedish friends as well as with relatives in Syria. On Yasmine’s *MSN* chat list, she had primarily relatives (mainly cousins in her age). The conversations were generally in Arabic, and they often centred on daily life and ordinary things. Sometimes they were supplemented by a web camera and microphone. The interview with Yasmine once again confirmed the frequent use of *MSN* among youngsters and that it seems largely to have replaced the ordinary telephone for communication between friends. *MSN* appeared to be a more pleasant way to communicate. She also talked about how she had more than 80 persons on her chat list, and that it was no problem to chat with several people simultaneously, which could be one reason for preferring *MSN* to the telephone. Yasmine, however, was careful to avoid chatting with strangers and revealing any personal information. Therefore, she had decided not to be a member of *Lunarstorm*. In the case of Yasmine and her sisters, they did not make acquaintances with new people through global searching (surfing). They preferred chatting with friends they already knew before or perhaps chatting with a friend’s friend or with someone whom they had met in real life. For instance, none of the sisters used public chat rooms, a function generally quite rarely used among the youngsters in this project. But there were exceptions, which we will see later when 14-year-old Mai talks about her internet use.

“You Read the Koran, Then You Repeat What They Say”

Iman (14 years old) and Nadia (12 years old) came to Sweden when they were very young and have no memory of Somalia. Due to civil war and insecurity in their parents’ homeland, they have never visited Somalia since then, and the family had not had much contact with old friends and relatives, as they did not know where they were (perhaps they were not even alive). They all

spoke Somali in the household. According to the mother, who came to Sweden in 1993 as a refugee, her husband had disappeared and she did not know what had happened to him. The mother had no intention of moving back to Somalia. Besides the mother, her two daughters Iman and Nadia participated in the first interview. In the second interview, which took place in their bedroom, only the girls Nadia and Iman were interviewed. The mother reported that she was very isolated, and it was mainly through her children that she remained in contact with the Swedish society. As Muslims, religion was explicitly mentioned as important, and all family members prayed five times per day. It was clear that this family made great efforts to maintain their religious identity as Muslims with Somali origins. The sisters had taken photos for the second meeting, and many of these were related to religion and Somali culture. Religion permeated their everyday life, first and foremost by prayers but also by symbolic markers and artefacts. Sweden, on the other hand, was regarded as a secularized society. Furthermore, religion was practiced by means of the internet, which served as a religious space for many reasons and seemed to have several functions. Eickelman and Anderson (2003: 5) pointed out that: "The new technologies of communication facilitate distinctively modern sense of religious and political identity that, rooted in specific local contexts, are also systematized on a translocal horizon..." The internet came to have a central role in learning the Koran, as none of the children attended Muslim schools. Besides learning about the Koran, they also learnt to write and speak in Somali by means of the internet.

Interviewer: Some children I've met, they go to school to learn about the Koran. Is that something you do too, go to school to learn about the Koran?

Iman: We do it at home.

Nadia: On the computer, uh huh.

Interviewer: You do it at home? On the computer? Can you tell me what you mean by on the computer?

Iman: Well, you learn, you repeat what he says, then you know the Koran.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, is it on a CD or on the Net?

Iman: No, it's a website on the Net.

Interviewer: Website? Uh huh. But is this something your mother has told you to do, or are you interested yourselves?

Iman: It's self interested.

Nadia: It's like both. It's like God who says it's good to learn about the Koran and things. And like Mama reminds us too sometimes and I think, I feel like it's important, because I...

[...]

Interviewer: Uh huh, but can you tell me, because I thought what you said about the computer was interesting...

Iman: Well like, you usually read what's written here, you know like I'm talking now, talking and talking, then you tape-record it. Just like you're doing, then you listen. And what we talk about, the Koran, you read the Koran, then you repeat, repeat, repeat. And then you write it down in Somali. Then you know it.

Although the family had four TV sets, they had no access to satellite channels. Instead the computer and internet were used for information seeking as well as maintaining contact with other Somalis in diaspora worldwide. The internet was not used a great deal to maintain personal contact with friends and relatives, as their friends and relatives in Somalia did not have access to the internet. The sisters were encouraged by their mother to search for information or to look at photos from Somalia, and internet was also used for learning the Koran as well as the Somali language. Through the internet, the children could get a different and more positive image of Somalia as compared to the portrayals of Somalia and Somali people on Swedish television.

Mother: Yes, for instance at, they have no lessons in the Somali language. No home-language classes here in X-town [city where they live]. And that's a problem, otherwise they would have got more information on their culture and language and what their country looks like and what's happening now and before. So they can get more information. But it doesn't exist yet. So I'm the one who tries to show them on the internet, or tell them that any country, it can be rich, it can be poor. But because of the war, for example in Iraq, it was a nice country before. But after the war, everything's gone and the children are sick and everyone's poor. Even if they were rich before. It's because of the war.

Interviewer: Okay, so then the internet becomes an important tool?

Mother: What they think that, the picture they have inside, it's different what they see on internet. Before they thought everyone was poor, then when they see the internet, then "wow". Not same.

[...]

Nadia: Yeah, we usually look at pictures like that of Somalia. Like there's some hotel that's been built. If a hotel is going to be closed. Stuff like that about buildings, roads and if there's been a car accident and why. They're really nice pictures actually.

Both girls used the internet frequently, sometimes combined with a web camera, for chatting with friends, e.g. *Lunarstorm* and *MSN*, either in Sweden or with Somali friends in diaspora, for instance a close friend living in London. Here they could discuss and compare living in Sweden with living in the U.K. The thought of moving to another country had sometimes crossed their minds, which could be an indication of the unstable situation that many migrants perceive. Nevertheless, chatting with schoolmates on the local level is also a part of everyday life. Once again, the need to be constantly online is mentioned, switching on the

computer when one has come home from school is becoming a mediated ritual in daily life. Research on the media as a ritual (e.g., Bausinger 1984; Silverstone 1994) has shown that they play a central role in structuring and re-structuring the time and space of their users. Among other things, it has been observed that the media seem to become an integral part of daily routines, offering their users a feeling of security. Like the other informants, Nadia and Iman had many friends on their chat list. However, their mother did not like it when they spent too much time on the computer, as she wanted them to do their homework first. *Lunarstorm* is a community where you surf for friendship relations, and both Nadia and Iman have used this website for a variety of purposes. They have searched for other Somalis as well as for other children with an immigrant background. They also confirmed friendships with their local Swedish friends from school and in their neighbourhood. Actually, *Lunarstorm* seemed to be a substitute for the idea of having a pen pal, which used to be popular especially among girls before the internet. The girls, however, were aware of the risks associated with chatting, and they were careful of not giving too much personal information. Only after some time, when mutual trust had been established, would they consider revealing their true identity (cf. Sjöberg 2002).

Interviewer: But do you say for example “I come from Somalia”?

Nadia: Yes, I’ve written that.

Interviewer: Right, because I’ve met a few children, who’ve got to know others, maybe if their parents come from Vietnam, or... that they’ve met others whose parents also come from another country.

Iman: I usually don’t write that. You know, bla bla bla. I usually, you know, I usually don’t say my telephone number and such, lots of things happen. Because it, I usually lie about my name and my telephone number and all that. But when I get to know someone, then I tell them my real.

Interviewer: But have you made new friends on *Lunarstorm*?

Iman: I’ve got to know lots of new people. We’ve lied to each other for like six months, then like “okay, I can trust you, you’re really good, but bla bla bla”, then we start laughing.

Interviewer: But how do you get to know them, do you like go in and check their nests and...

Iman: No, you search, I search like my friend Ida. And then her friend. And they her friend’s friend’s friend.

What stands out in this analysis is that religious and ethnic identity play a central role in the everyday lives of these two girls. As they are living in diaspora, they confirm their identities both within the local Somali-Muslim interpretive community, but also through the internet. The internet has become a virtual substitute for a homeland they cannot return to. The metaphor of “imagined communities”, as Benedict Anderson (1983) so strikingly put it, fits well into

this family's situation. Images of Somalia often constructed by Somali citizens living in diaspora and aimed at other Somalis in the same situation are spread over the internet. By surfing to these websites, families confirm their belongings and their identities as Somali citizens and they keep their dreams alive. But what is most important, and very much emphasized by the girls' mother, their religion can be practiced using the internet.

“It's Not Like You're Chatting About Vietnam, What's Happening There”

14-year-old Mai was born in Hong Kong and came to Sweden at the age of two. Her mother had been in Sweden for about fifteen years at the time of the interview (2005). It was not clear, however, what had happened to her father. Mai had two younger brothers, and the whole family was interviewed in the living room. As the mother did not speak much Swedish, an interpreter was also present, whom the family already knew. The mother worked at a factory and explained how Sweden had become her home, as she had her children here, and while away from her homeland all these years, she had also become accustomed to the Swedish way of living. She felt this way despite the fact that she had difficulties expressing herself in Swedish and that her children usually explained the news on television.

It was the mother in the family who stayed in touch with the relatives in Vietnam by telephone. The internet was not an option, as they did not have access to computers in the Vietnamese countryside. Like many other peers in this project, Mai liked being on-line even if she was not in her room, and besides chatting she enjoyed downloading and watching especially Chinese music videos. From the interview, it was obvious that Mai preferred to chat in Vietnamese, but this occurred with local friends (with a Vietnamese or Asian background) and with, for example, friends she had met at a Vietnamese party. Mai declared that her Asian identity was just as important as her Vietnamese identity; indicating that regional identity might be just as important (or more) than national.

Mai had been in Vietnam twice, but had not really enjoyed the visit per se, as she did not feel any kinship with her relatives there. The visits to Vietnam were so rare that she had not made her own friendships either. Nevertheless, she felt “at home” when she was there, because every one has an Asian appearance like her own and therefore she did not stand out in terms of physical appearance. But for the future, she dreamed of moving somewhere else, perhaps to Canada. At one point in the interview, Mai talked about her ambivalence as to whether Vietnam or Sweden was her home:

Interviewer: How does it feel to come to Vietnam?

Mai: Home, it feels like home, I don't know.

Interviewer: You feel at home?

Mai: Yes.

Interviewer: Is there something special that makes you feel at home?

Mai: Everyone there is Asian.

Interviewer: You mean more physical, to do with appearance?

Mai: Yeah.

Interviewer: But can it have to do with, like your mother was saying, people's way of life, of being, that it's also different than in Sweden?

Mai: Yes, there's a big difference.

Interviewer: What could the difference be?

Mai: They live differently, their houses are different.

[...]

Interviewer: Does Vietman feel more like home?

Mai: No, well, you don't feel like a stranger, you don't feel very close to home, because anyway I like Sweden, you know...

The family seemed to be loyal to their Vietnamese origins in terms of language and their cultural practices in general. With regard to religion, they were followers of Buddhism, but they generally did not care a great deal about religion in practice, especially the children. Like the other girls who spoke their home languages, Mai and her family spoke Vietnamese, although the children spoke a mixture of Vietnamese and Swedish to each other. Mai also mentioned that she had begun reading more Swedish books because she felt a need to improve her language skills. Once again language was as a central factor in identity formation, as well as the fact that Mai had been brought up as a Vietnamese, thereby creating a feeling of being Vietnamese, which may be difficult to express with words. The relational nature of the notion of identity is seen in how Mai perceived herself as Vietnamese while in Sweden, but when she was in Vietnam she felt that something was missing.

Interviewer: You said that you all are very Vietnamese in your behaviour, it might be difficult to explain, but what is it that makes...

Mai: I don't know. We grew up as Vietnamese. You still feel it inside you that you're Vietnamese. That's just how you feel.

[..]

Interviewer: Because I know a few children have said, well when they're in Greece maybe they're more Greek, but still not really because they have certain Swedish behaviours...

Mai: Right, but if you're here then you feel like like I'm really Vietnamese if I compare myself with Swedes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mai: But then when I go there, there's still something missing for me to be Vietnamese. So I don't know.

[...]

Mai: I don't know. I feel like both it doesn't matter like I feel it, I feel both like Swedish and like Asian. But maybe a bit more Asian.

While identifying herself as Vietnamese and Asian, Mai told us that she had no interest whatsoever in searching for information about Vietnam, and according to Mai, her mother did not encourage the children to do so. However, with the internet Mai found other ways to maintain and strengthen her cultural and ethnic identity – chatting with peers from Vietnam and Asia. Mai was one of the few young informants in our project who had been a member of specific ethnic public chat forums on the Net (*Katang* and *Asian Island*). But rather than talking about Vietnam, the participants chatted about everyday things related to Sweden, and it seemed that it was their common mother tongue that united them as a chat group. Here, a social mediated network was created in which you know most of the people or perhaps finding old friends from childhood; once again showing the interplay between online and offline. Through these chat forums she had made many friends whom she now mainly talked with through *MSN*. When the forums became filled with too many new and unknown people, she lost interest.

Interviewer: I was thinking there's *Lunarstorm*, so you mean you prefer being on that [the Asian chat rooms] to *Lunarstorm*?

Mai: Yeah, because there are more people you know there. And I know more Asians than Swedes. And then Lunar it's really, it's too big too wide-spread.

Interviewer: But these chat rooms, are they special discussion forums about Vietnam or, I mean do you notice that it's an Asian chat room or could it just be any chat room?

Mai: You notice because people use more Vietnamese there.

[...]

Mai: Well yes most people have a picture of themselves. Then you notice right away that it's an Asian website.

Interviewer: But it's not the case that you talk about Vietnam, for example? That you have a need to...

Mai: No, you don't. It's up to different, how well you know the person and what I mean which when you talk and all.

Interviewer: It can be different, it can shift...

Mai: Like if they're talking about travelling then it can suddenly be about what it's like in Vietnam. Then when you're talking about your free time here then it like varies.

Discussion

The cases discussed in the chapter touch upon several aspects that are vital in the debate on citizenship and participation. In an increasingly transnational world, with growing mobility and global media, some researchers have criticized the distinction of “here and there”: “Fixed binary orientations and identities, which refer to categories like ‘here’ and ‘there’ are far too one-dimensional”, has been claimed by Moser and Hermann (2008:76). But our findings clearly show that it would be a mistake to totally dismiss the “here-there” dichotomy. This might of course change as the girls grow older and perhaps move to another country to fulfil their dreams and in that way establish new transnational ties. Even if only one of the girls was born in another country than Sweden the importance of “there”, i.e. parents’ homeland, cannot be ignored. Although the girls seemed integrated into Swedish society, they perceived themselves as somewhat different due to e.g. appearance, way of living. Westin (2003: 186) explained how “[...] markers signal affiliation to or membership of categories, and they emphasize boundaries between categories. Social categorization becomes ethnic categorization through the mediation of ethnic markers. [...] Markers are perceptual catchers.” The chosen cases for this chapter also show how each family has their own story to tell and that an ambivalence relation is seen to “here and there”. While Sweden may be perceived as one’s home; being geared towards participation in Swedish society as far as one’s rational selves were concerned. Emotionally, however, the girls may have their hearts in parents’ homeland, especially in terms of bonds of friendship and kinship. Parallels can here be drawn to the concept of “fragmented citizenship” (Wiener 1997); acknowledging the potential distinction between the notion of belonging and the more legal aspect of nationality. We have to keep in mind that the role as citizen is probably seen differently depending on an individual’s special migrant situation. Decision-makers in Swedish society mostly care about the process of integration, as if all immigrants plan to stay. But some residents do not intend to stay on a permanent basis. They are sometimes forced to stay in the new country as refugees or in diasporas, but have their hearts in their home countries. These people may instead try to preserve their affiliation to their homeland, either in terms of official citizenship or an imagined citizenship. They are perhaps nursing a plan to return in the future or a dream of creating a new homeland, an “imagined community”, to use Anderson’s words (Anderson 1983). Still others are actually seeking a future in the new country. Naturally, in all these cases, participation and citizenship have different meanings.

It has also been seen how migrant children may become a crucial link to the Swedish society. The mother in the Somali family, for example, lived an isolated life and got most of her impressions through the children. This family’s situation reflects a common generation gap within the immigrant community as a whole. Parents may feel isolated because of unemployment and language difficulties, whereas their children are involved in a process of integration,

mainly through participation in school and various leisure activities but also having contact with local authorities in order to deal with family matters. Thus, excluding children from the public sphere and being treated as citizens-in-waiting (cf. Buckingham 2000) is far from adequate.

When discussing media use in general, the girls did not show a great deal of interest in reading or watching news on their own, and none of them were actively involved in any type of association. Instead, it was through face-to-face and personally mediated communication that daily things were talked about, mostly with peers and on the internet. Growing up with several cultures and having two homes (physically and/or imaginatively), the interviewed girls were involved and participated in daily talks concerning both “here” and “there”. In most conversations, talk about moving away from Sweden – back home or to other countries – was reflected on. This option seemed to cross their minds from time to time, a finding that is also confirmed by other interviews from the project. Moreover, the internet appeared to be a convenient space for such reflections, as you can chat with likeminded people in your home language and compare everyday experiences in the countries of migration. Sweden was not regarded as the ultimate goal of migration, especially for the young people in the families participating in the project. More predominant was an open attitude towards the routes one may take in life. This type of “floating lives” can according to Sinclair and Cunningham (2001: 9) be seen as a “third space for cultural strategies to become active forms of resistance to domination and marginalisation”. Migrant children are aware of their inferior position as a minority group, which is why they strive towards a change and “getting away”. This is manifested, for example, in their high ambitions for the future or in their thoughts about moving to another country to accomplish their life goals; which might indicate a rather transnational citizen life in future. Similar results have also been observed in previous research with migrant children in this age group, which is in a transitional period from childhood to adulthood (cf. Passani and Rydin 2004).

It is evident that internet is used as a discussion arena for migrant young people to talk about their everyday lives with likeminded youth, both within the local community and on a global level through transnational connections. As for the latter, this is done by chatting with friends and relatives from one’s own or parents’ homeland. These young people are forming and maintaining networks that constitute interpretative communities representing youth culture in general, but also representing the special issues of interest to migrant children. They, themselves, make up the agendas and the rules for participation (i.e., they reject being too personal or remaining in chat groups with too many unknown visitors). In these networks, young people are the actors and “beings”, and they can speak loudly about their situation in the “new” country and parents’ homeland. These “talks” also include religious matters and how sites on the Net provide a platform for maintaining and strengthening religious identity. Thus, emotional, religious and social attachments and identifications were being made outside the nation-state. Our chosen cases also exemplify

how “there” becomes an important aspect, not so much in direct relation to the former homeland (or country of origin), but in terms of how the girls positioned themselves in Swedish society and how they looked for peers with the same immigrant background in Sweden. By finding likeminded people with similar experiences, a collective identity was created and maintained. Thus, they searched for other young people on a local level, who shared their double bonding or hybrid identities. One crucial “tool” for this bonding was to communicate in one’s mother tongue language. Language and ethnic origin become a guarantee for security and a feeling of solidarity, and thereby constituting a platform for young people’s negotiations of their identity as Swedish citizens. However, even if these girls lived in a flow of global communication, it was not common for them to make transnational connections with unknown young people living in diaspora in other parts of the world.

Throughout the text, it is evident that the girls’ offline lives are closely linked to their online use. That virtual life and real life goes hand in hand and must be studied in relation to each other is also stressed in present academic debate (see e.g. Loader 2007). As for the girls in this chapter their internet use is not so much about exploring new virtual worlds and friends, as about keeping in touch with persons they already know or beginning to chat with a friend’s friend. Even when using public chat forums, they tend to prefer chatting with familiar people or perhaps persons they knew from their earlier childhood. When too many unknown and new people participated in the forums, they lost interest. The girls’ chatting behaviour was highly regulated by their need to be anonymous. They were clearly aware of the risks of revealing too much personal information, and their strategies were characterized by scepticism, as they felt you can never trust the people you are chatting with. This mistrust leads to a rather narrow internet use in terms of building or maintaining communicative networks with people one already know.

As have been stated, the girls were obviously very preoccupied with the fact that they are different from their Swedish counterparts. Even the girls who were born in Sweden expressed feeling different to some extent. They identified themselves as the “others”. We have also seen how they used different strategies to cope with this situation, in terms of how they used the media, in this case the internet. For these girls, the internet – by means of providing access to communities such as *Lunarstorm* – became what Dahlgren (1991) called the alternative public sphere for peers. This new space, which is largely created by the users themselves (at least its content, while the structure and rules of conduct of a website may be designed by a commercial company), may cause young people to feel more like participants, and thus the idea of “top-down” information is not applicable. Besides the fact that members have their own homepage with personal presentation, the community contains various discussion groups in which topics such as religion, philosophy, and happiness are discussed. While communities such as *Lunarstorm* are public, the girls mainly talked about the personal value of this type of internet usage and of maintaining or expanding their social network. *MSN*, on the other hand, was the modern

telephone for these girls. Studies of chat discussions indicate that language online has both similarities to and differences from written communication (e.g., Hård af Segerstad 2002). And one may wonder whether this will have any future implications for various forms of political communication among politicians, the media and the public (e.g., its content, who is communicating and transmission flows). Scholars within this field have started to explore the internet's potential for political participation, and have coined terms such as "electronic democracy" to stress such forums for opinion formation (for a critical discussion on this matter, see Karakaya Polat 2005).

Finally, national media are often criticized for their biased portrayals of immigrants and for the fact that people with an immigrant background are less visible in the media and in its production. There are even discussions of a structural discrimination taking place in the media (see, e.g., Camauër and Nohrstedt 2006). These issues were discussed a great deal in our project, both among parents and children. Thus, the internet may serve as an alternative public space in which the user has the power to choose his or her information or images. By means of the internet, the informants could move beyond the dominating political and cultural discourse in society, discourses in which the national media participate. The need for multiple publics and multiple voices is vital in any living democracy and for creating spaces of participation. These subaltern counterpublics may enable marginalised groups to form communities and voice their views to wider publics (Fraser 1992).

Notes

1. The project was funded by the Swedish Research Council 2004-2006.
2. CHICAM was funded by the European Commission Framework 5 and coordinated by the Institute of Education, London University. See website: www.chicam.org for reports with the main findings of the project. Ingegerd Rydin worked as researcher in the Swedish part of the project.
3. One of Sweden's most popular internet communities for young people is Lunarstorm (www.lunarstorm.se), which has about 1.2 million members. Each member has there own "nest" (in Swedish "krypin") where one gives a short presentation of oneself, has a guest book, Lunar-mail, pictures and list of added friends. As a member one can, for example, send mails to other members, write in their guest book, upload photographs and video clips. Besides the more personal presentation the community has also various public spaces such as graffiti wall and discussion clubs (Enochsson 2005).

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Chapter 9

Young Political E-partners of Turkey

Asli Telli Aydemir & Bilge Selen Apak

With the advent of strong neoliberal currents in political life after the 1980's, many young people have been retreating from political participation. Youth around the world have increasingly been accused of being apolitical. In the wake of the events and aftermath of 9/11 in 2001, however, we have witnessed an emerging panorama of political action and transformation for people of all ages, but especially among the young. In the Turkish political context, political corruption, the impact of the global information society, as well as candidacy to EU have been important factors that have triggered political mobilization in the beginning of the 21st century. The absence of an age-based quota that could open the door for younger members in the Turkish parliament, as well as the age-limit itself for candidacy (originally set at 30 years of age) were considered significant topics that galvanized Turkish young people's engagement prior to the general elections that took place in November 2007. Strong public opinion was formed by the mediation of relevant NGOs, think-tanks, media and ombudsmen, and in less than a year's time the age of eligibility for holding elected office was reduced to 25 in October 2006. This would not have been possible without the huge ICT campaign initiated by civic and political youth groups, organized on a local and national level. This paper investigates this campaign in terms of its scale and impact on the dynamics of the Turkish political system, and attempts to bring out its theoretical significance.

Theoretical Background: Social Movements and ICTs

There are various theories as to how social movements are shaped. Even when looking at the same movement, different aspects are highlighted by different analysts who follow their specific scientific paradigms and research interests. Dalton (1994) has typified five approaches to classify the most influential and distinct social movement theories: the classic (collective behavior) perspective, the resource-mobilization perspective, the perspective of the political opportunity structure, the ideologically structured perspective, and the discourse or

social constructionist perspective. One can also add an older, mass psychology approach which appeared in the early 20th century. The more recent theory of rational choice theory, however, tends to conceptually reduce social movements to aggregates of individual decisions.

We regard that the *Age 25 campaign* was a sort of catalyst, which had the effect of actually stimulating a broader social movement among young people in Turkey. From both academic and non-academic research done up until 2003, it had been established that only around ten percent of young people in Turkey were involved in activities that can be called “political participation”, that is, activities beyond voting in elections. For this particular study, we will focus on the perspectives of *resource-mobilization* and *political opportunity structure*. We will then attempt to analyze the impact of the use of ICTs/internet in this particular campaign, aiming to illuminate how this contributed to initiating a social movement. Following Chadwick (2006), we take a broad view of what comprises the internet – one that includes its ancillary technologies such as mobile phone linkages. Thus, we use “ICTs” and “internet” interchangeably in this text.

Within the resource mobilization approach, resources are usually measured in terms of the amount of money and numbers of staff available, including volunteers and members. However, the actual processes by which these resources are gathered or mobilized usually are either neglected or studied in a mainly descriptive fashion by focusing on particular techniques such as canvassing or direct mailing. ICTs are potentially powerful tools to build organizations, to collect and disseminate information, and to mobilize for action. Thus, we take the step of adding to this approach precisely a focus on ICTs as effective tools for establishing and running decentralized networks, or for mobilizing a virtual or physical community of activists.

In contrast to the resource-mobilization theory, the political opportunity perspective, represented by Tarrow (1998), Kitschelt (1986) and Kriesi *et al.* (1995), puts much emphasis on the way social movements interact with external reference groups (e.g. allies, opponents, state authorities, mass media, bystanders) in a given setting (van de Donk *et al.* 2004: 18-19). Furthermore, it tends to not put much weight on structural features – such as the character of regimes and access to the decision-making system – as crucial explanatory factors for the levels of social movement mobilization.

As to the content, means and channels of communication of the groups involved, surprisingly little attention has been paid by the political opportunity approach, even though the emphasis is on interaction. From a political opportunity angle, it is clear to us that the use of ICTs is likely to have consequences for the ways in which social movements interact with the environment. More specifically, ICTs could improve a movement’s capacity to act in a coordinated and coherent way, to react more quickly to an external challenge, and to become less dependent on established media in conveying their messages to a broader audience (van de Donk *et al.* 2004).

Moreover, it can be inferred from their affordances that the availability of ICTs could render certain kinds of actions, e.g. collections of signatures, more

likely than, say, those where participants have to physically meet each other, e.g. a street blockade. As will be explained in the sections below, the *Age 25* campaign relied extensively on the availability of ICTs for mobilizing different actors to be involved in the process.

According to van de Donk *et al.* (2004), with respect to the relations between ICTs and social movements, following general observations can be made:

- Some movements and some groups within those movements are more inclined to use some applications of ICTs than others. We assume that the internet is used particularly by two kinds of movement structures: a) informal networks with a large geographical reach, and b) big, powerful and more centralized social movement organizations.
- The internet may facilitate the traditional forms of protest such as rallies, demonstrations and collection of signatures, but it will hardly replace these forms.
- What the internet does – and does well – is to allow for the coordination of immediate mobilization across the globe, as for example practiced by environmental groups by targeting of the political leaders in territories where urgent matters are present.
- The internet may also serve as a tool to provide access to information that tends to be suppressed by the more established media.
- It is likely that the internet also affects the internal structure of social movement organizations, above all the density and direction of their links. In the long run, the net may help to intensify communication among all parts of an organization, thereby challenging domination of the top-down flow of communication.
- Because not only social movements, but also their opponents profit from ICTs' advantages, we do not assume that the existing constellation of power is fundamentally changed as long as all actors use ICTs to similar degrees.

There are certainly questions that can be posed to Dalton's (1994) theoretical perspectives on social movement and their typologies; these questions may best be treated along the lines of the observations above. For instance, the reason why ICTs are used more intensely in some organizations than others may depend on both the structure of organizations as well as the level of accountability of the internet for the members of those organizations.

It seems that the internet is an important facilitator of information and mobilization, but it is generally understood that it can not replace the personal contacts among the key organizers of protest campaigns. On the other hand, the internet allows many diverse groups to join a campaign; thus it becomes important for the core organizers to be able to build trust and solidarity based on personal connections; the net can even be used in this regard. It would

likewise be wrong to assume that actions like standardized e-mails addressed to a political leader can replace the physical encounter of masses of protesters. It is clear that personal investments are very significant for activists and protesters. Further, electronic petitions may at times raise doubts about the identity of their senders and their accountability. Thus despite its many advantages, there are constant issues concerning the internet, not least that its contents at times may lack the credibility traditionally attributed to mainstream media. This is because it lacks quality control: being open to everybody, there are no universal procedures for analysis of sources and the verification of identities. One can never be absolutely sure about who is behind a particular website or blog.

At the same time, we must reiterate that the internet's affordances and relevance in these contexts is so compelling: it makes possible direct contact between actors and stakeholders, as well as providing convenient and efficient means of communication for informal networks and more established groups. It occupies an unquestioned central place for groups organizing political campaigns of all kinds.

National Background: Youth in Civic Turkey Today

Given that the societal context structure (Ruhr 1996) is also a significant factor according to the political opportunity perspective mentioned above, we turn now – before outlining the campaign itself – to a very brief overview of some key themes relevant for understanding the situation of youth in the political-civic life of Turkey.

The Legal Age Limits for Political Participation; Electoral Laws

In regard to the legal framework on voting, a young person can now vote at the age of 18 in Turkey; yet, a party still needs at least 10 % support to be included in parliament. Thus, there are very few parties represented in the parliament, and generally marginal groups are excluded from political representation. Since the leading party has the majority of votes and opposes the inclusion of marginal groups, the election barrier can not be amended even though there is high public demand for it. Until 1996, political expression at the universities was not allowed in Turkey.

Youth Political Engagement

On the whole, research suggests that most types of conventional political participation activities declined in the years between 1999 and 2003; almost 70 percent of Turkish youth rejected all kinds of activities related with political parties. At the same time we find a tendency towards more active political participation of the alternative or extra-parliamentarian kind. From this broad perspective, it is possible to argue that relationship between the Turkish

youth and political participation did not improve during the last five years. The erosion of the political system emerges as a factor discouraging young people from first political and then civic participation. When the support for the system increases, conventional political participation and political career planning increase, while anti-system positioning leads to alternative political participation. Nevertheless, both dimensions of participation only attract about ten percent of the Turkish youth.

Internet Access and Use

Looking at the cyberlandscape, there are 19 million internet users as of December 2007, which is equal to 22 percent penetration. Almost 40 million people have mobile phones and 3.2 million people have personal computers (International Telecommunications Union 2006). Only about 1/10 households in Turkey possess a personal computer. The proportion of households with internet access including mobile phones is around seven percent. Younger generations are much more likely to use internet; computer and internet use decreases dramatically in groups that are over 30 and almost diminishes in 50+ cohorts (UNDP Human Development Report 2004). The internet cafes, access to computers in the workplace and schools are also significant since many young people spend more time outside home during the day. Especially internet cafes are important, since these are greatly frequented by the youth.

Candidacy to the EU

After the Justice and Development Party became the leading party in Turkey in November 2002, the Copenhagen Summit turned everyone hopeful about the accession to the EU. Even though Brussels suspended talks in December 2006, Turkish youth had already begun to develop a European vision in their minds. For example, the various youth exchange programmes are practical mechanisms for inter-cultural exchange, mobility, capacity building and the involvement of disadvantaged young people.

Youth Parliament and Local Agenda 21

Agenda 21, endorsed by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (known as the "Earth Summit") held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is a comprehensive global action plan for socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development in the 21st century. The Local Agenda 21 process entails the building of, and reaching a consensus on, a "sustainable community" vision, encompassing long-term, mid-term and short-term goals, and the subsequent preparation of local action plans. In the developed world, the European countries have pioneered in launching the respective LA-21 processes in the aftermath of Rio. As of the beginning of the 21st Century, over 4,000 municipalities in Europe are effectively engaged in LA-21 processes. On

national level, a project entitled the “Promotion and Development of Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) in Turkey” was developed with the initiative of IULA-EMME – International Union of Local Authorities, Section for the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East region, to support the local authorities in Turkey commencing their respective LA 21 processes, following the Habitat II Conference. This project, conducted with the support of UNDP – United Nations Development Program, was launched in late 1997 and completed in 2000, following an implementation period of about two years.

The Local Youth Parliaments in Turkey are organized on volunteer basis within the structure of city councils. They are civic platforms where youth civil society organizations, high school and university clubs, youth center representatives and independent youth actively contribute to decision-making processes in the city. The city councils have been constituted as a result of the public reforms underheld within the scope of LA 21 in Turkey. Each city council has two representatives that have seats in the youth parliament. The *Age 25* campaign has been initiated, continued and developed by the youth parliament.

The “Age 25” Campaign

Evolution of the Campaign and the Impact of ICTs¹

Reducing the age for eligibility for holding elected office has been a key political issue, discussed for almost 45 years by several parties or politicians. However, it was always used by potential vote-seeking major parties as a last-instance strategy, and not even presented to the Constitutional Commission in the form of a draft bill. Altan Oymen, who is a former politician and at present a notable political columnist, wrote on the issue many times, trying to activate both citizens and politicians. On an additional note, Mr. Oymen has long been an individual activist for the involvement of youth in politics since his younger days, and he engaged in political activities at universities when this was still against the law in Turkey. Therefore, his related experience and efforts turned him into an ombudsman in the eyes of young campaigners.

We would like to underline the fact that until very recently, Turkey was the only country in Europe with electoral age limit (i.e. to become a member of parliament) of 30 and a voting age of 18². Many civil society organizations like the ARI Movement, Youth for Habitat (YFH) and Local Agenda 21 decided to take action in regard to this contradiction. In March 2006, the AKP (Justice and Development Party), the ruling government party, launched the event “Youth Meeting and Discussing the Future” in local districts and this is how the issue became a hot topic of the agenda. At the national summer school meeting of Local Agenda 21 on 17-21 September 2006 in Kusadası, *Age 25* was one of the main issues; Altan Oymen was invited to the event as a guest speaker and supported them throughout the campaign, not least via his newspaper columns.

Immediately afterwards, the plan was on the run. Mr. Oymen announced the campaign and the declaration³ while he wrote about the time he spent with

young people during the meeting in his column for the first time (23 September 2006). The campaign started on a local scale and soon moved to the national arena, with support from the youth parliament representatives of 73 Turkish cities in all seven regions of Turkey.

Every city representative sent the campaign announcement to their local media. All at once, popular websites used by locals or university students of that city, local TVs and local newspapers announced that “I want to be elected” campaign starts on 6 October all through Turkey. They spread the word even from their own blogs. Another effective method was sending massive numbers of e-mails and faxes to parliamentarians representing respective cities in the parliament. Thus, all the parliamentarians were informed by the campaign and more or less forced to respond. At the national level, Mr. Oymen’s column as well as grassroots advocacy inspired the other journalists. Moreover they published a campaign website (now closed) that gathered petition signatures online and reached the number of 30,000 in three days. The aim of gathering massive number of signatures was not to send them to some authority, but to help make people that they were participating and taking responsibility for it.

Organized Youth Action

On the campaign kick-off day, all volunteers opened campaign desks at the central squares of the cities and at university campuses to gather signatures. During the campaign, related pictures were uploaded to the campaign information website (now closed); the website was updated on an hourly basis by each local volunteer to inform about their city and create mutual motivation. The good news arrived already on the first day of the campaign. The draft bill about reducing the age of eligibility for holding elected office to 25 was prepared by AKP⁴ and accepted by all members of the Constitutional Commission in the Turkish Parliament unanimously. This constituted the initial success of *Age 25* campaign.

After a week, the age limit of 25 for parliamentarians was made into a law (13 October 2006). This was a victory – after a 45-year struggle – achieved by youth through lobbying for seven days and intense campaigning for 20 days. In short, by the extensive facilitation of ICTs, the campaign gained both great speed and momentum.

The Sustainability of the Campaign: What Happens Now?

After this success, the same group of young activists was also fast enough to launch the next campaign (slogan “Our votes to the young”) which aimed to locate youth representatives in the parliament between ages of 25-30 after the 2007 elections and to try to exclude those MPs who were against young candidates taking seats in the parliament. This second campaign got its inspiration from the campaign in Sweden for raising the quota of women in the parliament⁵.

Although potential candidates from various youth organizations and sections were busying the party lists, it was still very unclear how many 25-30 year old

candidates would actually enter the parliament in the November 2007 elections. The number of young MPs would probably not multiply in number in five years, but the significant side of the campaign is the political mobilization it had already created among youth. In a survey conducted by Meropoll on 1 February 2007, 85 percent of all 18-25 year-old voters indicated that they would vote in the upcoming elections. It is thus very apparent that they feel better represented than they were before the *Age 25* campaign.

Case Study of *Age 25*: Voices from the Campaign

Online Interviews

Almost one and half year after the campaign we prepared surveys for the campaign producers and local activists (August-September 2008) in order to analyze the impact of ICTs on a local and national level and to see whether demographical differences play a role in civic engagement during a campaign that took place concurrently 73 cities of Turkey.

We contacted six local coordinators, who were responsible for a specific region or city and two producers as the head planners and the web master of the campaign's web site. The questionnaires were sent to these eight activists through *Google's online spreadsheets* and their responses were collected via the same feature. We also held a phone conversation with them for confirmation and additional information.

Generally speaking, activists approach the topics similarly; the few distinct arguments are assumed to be affected by different regions' cultural-political behaviour. The age range of the local coordinators who completed the survey is between 23 and 29 for representatives of Eastern Anatolia, South Eastern Anatolia, Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean regions. All of them are also members or executive boards of other NGOs⁶.

Below, we present some of the key findings derived from the answers provided by the six local coordinators and a national coordinator. This material has been synthesized and reflects personal accounts of campaigning for a civic and political cause.

Becoming Active Participants in the Campaign

Mostly the activists were already in the process from the beginning of the campaign. Since they were working for National Youth Parliament actively at various positions they had been a part of the evolution itself. They automatically became responsible for the city or region coordinators they already knew. One of them, Mehmet, explains his participation in the campaign as follows:

Mehmet: Those times I was on the executive council member of Local Agenda 21 National Youth Parliament representing the Mediterranean Region. I support

every movement for youth in order to have equal rights and gain freedom of speech on democratic platforms. This movement got started with these thoughts and I was included in all processes from the birth of the idea, taking on a shape and turning into action.

When asked about their rationale for volunteering in the organization of the campaign, one of the activists, Rahim, explained it like this:

Rahim: In international projects, I had the chance to meet young people from many countries. There were also young local and national coordinators among those I met. Even though these young people were not better than us in terms of leadership and knowledge, they had their electoral rights. I joined this campaign because I believed a lot of young people in Turkey would make good local and national leaders.

The Role of Website in the Campaign

All the activists agree that the website was a main hub, meeting point, communication centre and motivation trigger of the campaign. Rahim, again, explains what seems to be a general view among the activists:

Rahim: Especially the website was effective. One of the main reasons is that the name of the campaign was self-explanatory. "I want to be elected" had the top rank in most search engines. Besides, all the other youth NGOs supported the campaign, as volunteers being young internet users increased the popularity of the website. Plus, I think the statement: "I support the '*I want to be elected campaign*'" written as a signature below every sent e-mail was an effective method.

Others, like Idris, put it slightly differently. He emphasizes synchronous conduct of the campaign. The website included spontaneously local NYPs' (National Youth Parliament) activities and the discussions in the National Assembly. Idris says:

Idris: The website was a motivating tool for the local activists in cities all over Turkey. The updates on campaign events coming from other youth assemblies encouraged us to increase the local participation in our site. At the end of each day we were able to analyze what had been done on national and local levels and the next day we could try different methods to attract more attention in our region.

Mehmet also focuses on motivation and unity, saying: "The people from various cities from all over Turkey looking at the same screen, thinking the same with the same aim. Just the thought of this great unity is fabulous!"

The Advantages/Disadvantages of Internet as a Communication Channel for the Local Campaigns

The internet creates a common ground for each local group. Secondly, the website was handy for spreading the word quickly and a reference-point for informing the campaign supporters.

Başak Demir, one of the head coordinators articulates the role of the internet: “Pressed about the role of ICT development in the nation-wide campaign, the obvious slowly became clear”. Başak listed the ways that ICT was essential to the effort:

Başak: E-mail was the central nervous system, enabling fellow campaigners to stay in touch with one another and the press. Digital media put a face on the campaign, bringing the issue to life through photos and footage sent to and among media outlets. Scanners became documentation and dissemination tools, transforming copies of the petitions into digital evidence, which was then e-mailed to members of the Turkish National Assembly [...] Internet gave pace to communication between Youth Parliaments and YFH Assembly. Then, electronic as well as traditional media had an indirect influence on the amendment of the Constitution.

The Roles and Effects of Mass Communication Sources on Local Campaigns

Since not everyone in Turkey is an internet user and internet is not the strongest source to set the daily agenda of the country yet, first of all newspapers and secondly TV had big parts to declare the campaign to the nation. While national press gave its name to the campaign, the local press made it credible to the locals.

The daily *Radikal* reserved the headlines for the movement for the first couple of days, then like a chain effect, it started to get attention from other newspapers and TV news channels. “Throughout that week, the movement was top news in the agenda of Turkey”, says Başak. Idris witnesses the people in Hakkari paying more attention after *Radikal* published the campaign details displaying the city of Hakkari as an example in the news.

How Online and Real time Events Trigger Each Other

Website and e-mails were the main factors that eased the movement in 73 cities at the same time. Each local success was published and was instantly visible online. For Rahim, a short time campaign is all about motivation. He thinks the motivation should be kept high in order to be successful.

Rahim: During the campaign every city stated the number of signatures gathered in our e-mail groups. If one of the cities had had low results, the next day they worked much harder to increase the participation. Besides, all

press releases were also online within an hour in the website, something that encouraged us positively.

Başak, the head coordinator evaluated this question for the post-campaign period:

Başak: After constitutional amendment, we have seen forums in the internet in which young people were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the new regulation. The negative response was mostly from males as they had a gender-specific argument ‘Boys go to the army and won’t be ready for politics [...]’ However they forget the young women.

The Difficulties of Being a Local Coordinator

At this point, the campaigners had different difficulties varying from city to city from East to West. In other words, in Turkey, citizens have a distinct perception of politics and beliefs of religion according to their location. Views about the capabilities of a youngster also vary according to the level of social development in different geographical locations.

Rahim from Eastern Anatolia complained about the lack of trust and support from elders:

Rahim: The public is not accustomed to youth in active politics. Especially for the locals in South Anatolia, this campaign took place far from the capital and the elders didn’t believe that we could possibly have an influence on the government. Even our parents did not trust us. However, the problem was that youth never demanded their rights before.

Idris from Hakkari, where terrorist attacks have been frequent within the last few years, was hesitant in the beginning to set up the campaign. Since the political campaigns or propaganda are only expected of political parties in the city, the group was afraid that the municipality would not allow them to act. Furthermore, it could be seen as a rebellious act against the traditional political structure in the East.

Perceptions of What the Campaign Accomplished

We included this question in the survey since so far, the campaign is successful in theory. Activist youth had managed to create a change in Turkey for the first time in such a short period of time; therefore the response to this question is decidedly affirmative. However, most of the campaigners consider that there are further steps they need to take for the sustainability of the movement and the efforts, as Mehmet indicates: “Yes, the electoral age has been decreased to 25, but it will stay as a statement on paper unless the public supports actual young candidates as they supported the campaign.”

Başak further explains that Youth for Habitat (YFH) already has future campaign plans linked to *Age 25*.

Başak: Constitutional amendment is a remedy of youth and the fact that it has been realized by a grassroots movement is an exceptional success. We held a campaign in the previous elections for the candidacy of young people in political party lists. Within the next period, new actions that allow active participation of youth are necessary. For the following elections we developed a programme for youth to take active roles in local administration. A short movie of the program can be found on the website of YFH. Also we are implementing another project in cooperation with UNDP for the participation of young women in politics.

Personal Interviews

We arranged three interviews with different actors of the campaign. Our first interview was with Sezai Hazir, the YFH coordinator as the Chief representative of the local youth network. The second interview was with Altan Oymen, the renowned supporter and ombudsman of the campaign. The final interview was with the Youth Branch President and the ICT coordinator of AKP, the leading party in government, in order to learn their general approach and views for political representation of youth in Turkey and more specifically the *Age 25* campaign. Below are summaries of our accounts from these interviews.

YFH Coordinator, Sezai Hazir interview (December 2006): Sezai Hazir asked us to include a single statement that reflects his personal account of *Age 25*:

Sezai Hazir: We have experienced that even though in a country where youth is so-called depoliticized and not participating sufficiently at any level of politics, youth driven and youth oriented campaigns can be realized. Such campaigns can become landmarks in the political history of a country. Information and communication technologies definitely create a novel scope of political mobilization and instant power of dissemination to all levels of society.

Altan Oymen interview (22 March 2007): Renowned journalist and political columnist of daily *Radikal*, Altan Oymen indicated that he felt empathy for the young campaigners since he could not enter the parliament himself in the beginning of the 60's because of the constitutional deficiency. He added that youth and women have always been issues of concern for him in the Turkish political arena.

As an experienced journalist, he emphasized that on a local level, the fact that the campaign was initiated at the same instance in each city was important and had news value. One thing that eased the task of the campaigners was that the process of Turkey's EU accession was on the agenda; it was easier to compare and benchmark the structure of parliaments in order to draw attention to the structural deficiency of the Turkish parliament as well as the Constitution.

The campaign had an interesting result according to Oymen. The AKP government took over the campaign after it passed the legislation and started strengthening its youth branches all over the country. On the other hand, the opposing party, CHP (Republic and People's Party) was overshadowed and the central organization of youth branches stopped functioning.

AKP Youth Branch (April 2007): Interview with Youth Branch President Hakan Tutuncu and board member, responsible for ICT Fatih Yilmaz: AKP Youth Branch President, Hakan Tutuncu, did not deny the fact that their party did not do much during the campaigning process before the constitutional amendment took place. However, he tried to justify their position by claiming that they are the only party in Turkey with qualified youth representation in the General Board, that they are keen on grassroots advocacy, and that they organize regular meetings with young members. He added that unlike other parties in the parliament, their structure and organization was solid and spread around the country in 81 cities. One of his noteworthy remarks was that he is among the 15 consultants of the party president as a potential young MP. The ICT coordinator of the party, Fatih Yilmaz, explained their new media policies, but ignored the campaign advocacy issue even though he repeated a few times that he believed in the potential of educated young people in Turkey.

Interview from an Outside Source⁷

Başak Demir (cited in West 2008), the vice-coordinator of Youth for Habitat and the lead campaigner, attributes the success of the campaign in large part to ICT development. "At the same time there were these parallel movements", Başak recalls: "the growing consensus among youth that the age for election was too high, and the growth in e-skills training, telecenters, and youth activism that infused the consensus. In the world of politics and mass media, the time horizon for making change is extremely short. Youth for Habitat focused their energy on the campaign for an intensive two months, the centrepiece of which was gathering signatures for a petition."

Concluding Remarks: Lessons from the Age 25 Campaign

Political Outcome of the Campaign

Even though the end result seems like a real victory, there was an unexpected setback. The parliament decided to hold early elections and the November 2007 elections were moved to July 2007. In June 2007, only around a month before the elections took place, the Constitutional Court announced that since the Age 25 law had been passed in October 2006, this meant that the time period between passing of the law and the election date was less than the required one year. Thus, 25-30 year olds would not be able to gain their electoral rights during the 2007 elections. Certainly, this created an initial disappointment, especially on the side of the campaigners, but it did not seriously dampen the political

goals and sense of political mobilization. Younger politicians still competed for leading positions in the youth branches of parties, and are actively involved in trying to shape the political agenda for the 2012 elections.

As for the age profiles in the Turkish parliament, after 2002 elections, only 6.4 percent of the MPs were under 40. After the 2007 elections, that figure moved to 11 percent. There are today 33 MPs in the 35-40 age category, and 14 MPs in the 30-35 group. This is a considerable improvement in terms of younger political exercise, but there is still a long road to travel before the demands of younger generations are reflected in a satisfactory way in the established political life of Turkey.

Theoretical Reflections

As stated at the outset, we underscore the notion of campaigns as initiators of social movements on a national level. The *Age 25* campaign is an theoretically interesting case for a number of reasons:

1. It started out locally, expanded to national level in a few days via the grassroots action of the youth parliaments. We consider the establishment of youth parliaments as a political opportunity that mobilizes young people in Turkey.
2. It can be seen as a collaboration between a youth network and the local government that initiates a political movement on national level. Başak Demir (cited in West 2008) reiterates: “[T]he petition alone had over 100,000 signatories [...] Youth for Habitat, it seems, is more than just the two hundred volunteers, and more than its 11,000 graduates in ICT. It is a movement. A movement that should not be confused as an agent of external pressure, but instead seen as a partnership with local government and a provider of a valuable resource to the changing Turkish economy: a skilled and motivated modern workforce.” These figures point to the resource-mobilization perspective, but the process through which the campaign takes place is also significant for our study. Thus, our analysis cannot be limited to this perspective alone.
3. It is an online campaign that moves offline in a few days: Tables for gathering signatures are prepared in city centres in each geographical region of the country. Volunteers work online and offline simultaneously. Radio and television programmes feature campaign announcements, declarations and host youth representatives so that the campaign has wide public consent. Popular dailies make headlines and news stories about the event. At the time when both ICT features and traditional channels of communication are used intensively, the number of visits to both websites of the campaign is at its peak.
4. It is a good example for how the simple features of ICTs may mobilise a large youth network, create motivation for the campaigners as well

as provide a platform for seamless communication with general public, political actors and traditional media.

5. It is also good illustration for how a local youth network acts as a facilitator and capacity developer on a national level. The fact that a second campaign has been initiated right after the success of the first one by the same network proves the sustainability of the first campaign.
6. It can be viewed as a legal change from bottom-up at grassroots level, rather than top-down, for the first time in Turkey. The end result is very significant since a constitutional amendment is achieved in just 20 days in order to encourage more young people into political practice. This amendment was viewed as a taboo in many circles since the 1960s'.

To sum up, one should concentrate a little on Turkey's specific political arena. It would be really rational to argue that this electoral law should have been drafted a long time ago. However, it is clear that the political priorities of the parties in Turkish representative democracy have pointed in different directions in the past few decades. The new generation is right on track to overthrow the conventional perspective of MPs and divert their attention to their own counter-spheres. They have already started using their ICT skills in order to overthrow the legal boundaries of the political system as well as its top-down emphasis in political advocacy and decision-making. This change will only bear its fruits if the number of seats they allocate in the parliament increase as instantly and as thoroughly as their campaign.

Notes

1. It would be useful to bring in some facts at this point (see URL: www.tbmm.gov.tr, http://www.ucansupurge.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3423&Itemid=72 (Consulted on 21 February 2007). In 19 EU and candidate countries, electoral age is 18, in 4 of them it is 21 (Belgium, Luxemburg, Ireland), in 1 of them it is 23 (France) and in 3 of them it is 25 (Italy, Greece, South Cyprus).
Current Youth voting age is 18 in Turkey. As of 13 October 2006, electoral age is 25. Before it was 30. In the 2007 elections approximately around 5 million young people were expected to vote for the first time (information from AKP Youth Branch website and newspaper Radikal), with the current electoral age, another 6 million eligible candidates would be at hand and another striking figure was that 11 million voters among the 43 million eligible voters were in the 18-25 year-old range (Sapan 2007).
2. See appendix 2 for voting and electoral age limits in EU member and candidate countries.
3. See appendix 1 for the *Age 25* campaign declaration.
4. Turkish abbreviation for The Justice and Development Party, the leading party in Turkey at the time of the campaign. This party will be referred as AKP from this point on for practical purposes.
5. For further information and resources on the project, you may check the Global Database of Quotas for Women website at www.quotaproject.org
6. We would like to thank Başak Demir, the vice coordinator of Youth for Habitat and one of the head coordinators of the campaign; Ayhan Soyfidan, representative of the Aegean Region; Rahim Aladag volunteer for Eastern Anatolia; Idris Agacanoglu from Hakkari; Umut Suvari

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7. This outside source refers to the summarized Başak Demir interview, cited in West (2008).

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Appendix 1. *Declaration of Age 25 Campaign*

We are representatives from universities, high schools, non-governmental organizations, youth centres and youth groups.

We are youth parliamentarians chosen democratically in our cities.

We are the youth that acts as conscious volunteers, we are aware of issues, produce solutions, share. We are connected to our values, we initiate and support development.

We are Local Youth Assembly.

We are Local Agenda 21 National Youth Parliament that established Youth Assemblies in 73 cities of Turkey. We are a civic body that aims at a holistic political view for youth of our country.

We want to denote that our inability to be elected before the age of 30, whereas we can vote at 18, and 35 percent of the population is considered as young, definitely clashes with democratic principles of representation. Although we have the biggest youth population in Europe, we are the only country which has 25 as candidacy age.

As we are Local Agenda 21 National Youth Parliament we will start the campaign “I WANT TO BE ELECTED” on the date 6 October 2006, Friday at 12 o'clock by reminding the words of Prime Minister, President of Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) and opposition parliamentarians that say “We agree about the age 25”.

The campaign I WANT TO BE ELECTED will start at the same time in all our cities and will surely succeed in decreasing the candidacy age limit to 25 with the sole voice of youth.

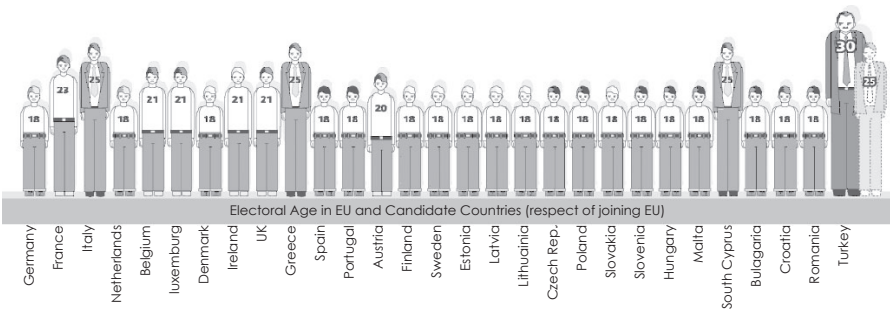
As we are the youth who grew up in this country, we do not only want to vote but also BE ELECTED.

WE ARE NOT ONLY THE LEADERS OF FUTURE BUT PARTNERS OF TODAY.

Local Agenda 21 Youth Parliament.

Appendix 2.

Voting and Electoral Age Limits in EU and Candidate Countries
by Turgay Tuysuz (Radikal, 5 October 2007)



Part IV

Websites

Chapter 10

Spectators, Visitors and Actors

Addressing Young Citizens in Politics Online

Ulf Buskqvist

New media technologies have always arrived together with high hopes for democratic promise (McQuail 1995) and this is also true when it comes to internet. The implications of internet for democracy and the public sphere have been a marathon theme in the research since the mid- 1990s, when the technology began to be used by media corporations as well as political parties, social movements, and private persons (see Chadwick 2006 for an overview). Much of the earlier research, however, displayed something of a theoretical bias. The democratic potential of the internet has often been emphasized in the light of conceptual, and sometimes speculative, analyses of media technology's "inherent characteristics". A common idea has been to use the technology's characteristics as a starting point for trying to estimate its democratic and political implications (see e.g. Poster 1997; Slevin 2000). Much attention has been devoted to the notion of *interactivity*, which has been seen and interpreted as strengthening the possibility for citizens to actively participate in the sphere of public politics (Holmes 1997; Tsagarousianou *et al.* 1998; Hague and Loader 1999; Axford and Huggins 2001; Bentivegna 2002; Jenkins and Thornburn 2003; Papacharizzi 2004). There was initially a strong preference within the literature for speculating about the potential usage of the internet rather than studying actual use and user behaviours. However, more recently, several studies have been conducted that have instead paid heed to internet use – and with regard to its political impact (e.g. Bakardjieva 2005; Buckingham and Willett 2006; Dahlgren 2007; Loader 2007a).

Another theme in research has been the concern for young people's weak interest for activities comprising traditional political engagement (Loader 2007b). The decline in the election participation during the last decade has been explained by decreased participations of young citizens. Political parties, youth organisations and trade-unions also seem to attract less interest and have fewer young members today than they used to have (Putnam 2000; Pettersson 2001; Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003). There is also a deep distrust towards the political establishment (parties, parliament and also traditional popular movements) among young people (Möller 2000; SOU 2000). This is often

seen as worrisome since young people are in the process of developing the ways in which they will view themselves as citizens throughout their lifetime (Livingstone 2002).

As a counterbalance to the worrying descriptions there are, however, also other trends that according to Dahlgren and Olsson (2008) – among a number of other scholars – might inspire more optimistic discussions about democracy and the young citizens' commitments. For instance, from the research literature about alternative political movements it is clear that internet is of great importance as a technological resource for influencing public opinions, coordinating activities, and so on. (Castells 2001; Kahn and Kellner 2004; Brundin 2008; Dahlgren and Olsson 2007a; Dahlgren and Olsson 2007b).

These two trajectories – internet's inherent, potentially democratic features and the decreasing political engagement among young people – seem intertwined in a compelling way. Young people are technologically skilled, and various forms of online practices are an important part of their everyday lives (Buckingham and Willett 2006). On the one hand there is research focusing on internet's capacity to facilitate more and better traditional forms of political engagement (e.g. Bimber and Davis 2003). On the other hand there are researchers who see internet's contribution as more relevant to addressing new forms of citizenship (e.g. de Jong et al 2005; Cammaerts and Carpentier 2006; Dahlgren 2007).

Given this meta-theoretical point of departure, it becomes important to carry out empirical analyses of the various forms of political communicative practices manifested online where young people are addressed and invited to participate. The analysis in this chapter aims to do this by employing a design that makes it possible to attain a multifaceted picture of the web's public political function for young people.

Notes on Methodology and Theoretical Perspective

This chapter analyses the conditions and forms of young citizens' online communicative practices within various types of websites. It brings data from a Swedish study of institutional use of web sites representing various types of political arenas in the public sphere.¹ Websites are defined as public interaction arenas where special conditions are established for the users' participation. Conditions for participation refer both to the websites' format and design as well as the situational and institutional frames within which the participation is expressed and shaped in various ways. A main point has been to compare websites located within separate institutional contexts, in terms of how they are designed and how they are used. In line with Cohen and Aratos' (1992) model of modern society, three types of websites were studied: media corporations, political parties and social movements, all in connection with the Swedish parliamentary election 2002 and the election to the European parliament in 2004. The main point of departure was the questions of how websites are

employed by institutions within different political spheres in order to address young citizens and offer them forms of participation. The websites included in the study at hand are presented in the following diagram.

Figure 1. Websites Included in the Analysis

Media Corporation Websites	Party-political Websites	Social Movement Websites
Aftonbladet (AB) (tabloid)	Swedish social democratic party (S) and the youth association (SSU)	Swedish Attac (Attac)
Swedish Daily (SvD) (broadsheet)	The Moderate Party (M) and the youth association (MUF)	Vegan.nu (Vegan) (animal rights movement)

The analytical approach is based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal communication theory and Fairclough's (1995a) critical discourse analysis. A central basis for my approach is that all meaning creation is multimodal (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). It is simply impossible to create meaning through one single analytically distinguishable semiotic resource system.

Fairclough (1995b: 53-62) argues that the production of the texts, the texts themselves and the reception of texts are all parts of the discursive practise and that all of these levels should be included in a critical discourse analysis. In the case of the analysis at hand, however, the critical discourse analysis is incomplete, as the text reception dimension is excluded in the analysis of the three websites. The analysis instead focuses primarily on the texts themselves and the discursive practices involved in producing the websites. In order to be able to describe how websites are designed, and understand and explain why, the analysis concentrated on the multimodal design of the sites, that is, how discursive techniques were employed to achieve various discursive practices.

Silverstone (1999) describes the internet as a "presentation culture" where individuals, organizations, companies and authorities present themselves on websites. A point of departure of the study was that websites constitute the presence of individuals and institutions, as well as the representations of what they wish to say. Thus I treated a website as a single communicative event (the institution's "voice"), but at the same time took into account the potentially ongoing discursive struggle between different communicative practices.

Multimodal communication theory lacks any clear interaction dimension. To be able to develop knowledge about what goes on between actors on the websites, the theoretical perspective has been supplemented with a social interaction theory, primarily based on Hutchby's (2001) research on the relationship between technology and interaction.

In the next sections I will first present the overall findings from the analyses of the three website categories and their various constructions of politics and young users. The analyses are focused on differences between websites with regard to their institutional context; I take up, in turn, the media companies, the political parties, and the social movements. I also give a brief reflection

about two important similarities between the three categories: the low priority given to the EU-election and the general interest in maximizing the number of the visitors. Thereafter I will discuss some of these themes more thoroughly and also give a few empirical examples to illustrate my findings. The focus is on the concepts “user roles” and “interactivity” and on the differences in design between the websites’ discussion boards and the interactions taking place on them.

The Media Web Sites: Young Users as Spectators in Need of Play and Entertainment Activities

On the media corporations’ websites the political election campaigns were depicted with the help of attraction as a dominant form of communication. The websites functioned first and foremost as extensions of television. The focus was on politicians’ appearances on TV, which were commented upon, reviewed and evaluated. The users were also invited to rate their performance, and discuss amongst themselves. Interest was primarily directed to the form of the appearance rather than the contents of the politicians’ statements. This can be illustrated in headlines such as: “Visit our political playhouse”, “Special pictures: Party leaders in ways you never have seen them before”, “Mix up party leaders”, “Change hairstyle to your favourite politicians” and “Review the election posters”. The election was portrayed like a sporting event with winners and losers, favourites and challengers – as a struggle where the differences between parties are exposed and the similarities glossed over. It is a question of a “discourse of attraction” (Ekström 1998) in which media willingly adopt the role of arranging spectacles, with politicians as “performers” and celebrities.

The media corporations invited and addressed the young users primarily as audiences and information seekers looking for information about a political election that in various ways was made entertaining and dramatic so that users would click their way around the site. In the interviews with the producers, functions for game and play activities were put forward as attracting especially young visitors. Game and play facilities are examples of adaptive interactive features where the user is invited and allowed to modify an artefact for certain purposes. They are encouraged to modify pictures or play different kinds of games. It is much about doing performances in different forms of entertainment features.



*Politainment? Example of an Adaptive Play Function
(Aftonbladet 2002-09-13)*

In the above examples the users were invited to take part in the realisation of a general popular discourse of politics. The users, especially the young ones to whom the functions are directed, were addressed as a participants in that he/she is given a possibility to conduct a social act with the help of an interactive function. However, they were also implicitly placed in a spectator position, watching the election from a distance, as a spectacle. The theme of political satire in form of caricatures has a long history in the mass media. Here we can see how the theme can be expressed in new ways online. The online edition of *Aftonbladet* invited the user to change hairstyles of the political leaders and to reshape their faces. The users were encouraged to accept a role as satirical humorists. These interactive functions of carnival attractions arranged the young citizens' joking of authorities (Bakhtin 1986/1965), and at the same time providing the young users with the perceived need for constant entertainment in online settings.

The Political Party Web Sites: Young Users as Visitors Searching for Pre-packaged Information

The parties' websites show that their own understanding of politics was much in line with that of journalism. Parties struggle to show how interesting and important politics is, and also strive to attract visitors, especially by making it entertaining. The website production is influenced by media logic, and its demands for speed and actuality. The imagined user of the party websites was, above all, the potential voter but also the website visitor, who, like school pupils, wishes to have fun at the computer. This can be explained in light of the mediatisation of politics and the "paradox of media-adapted politics" (Ekström and Eriksson 1999; Eriksson 2002). Politicians adapt to the media and the factual political issues are eclipsed by how politicians are portrayed (Corner 2003).

It is apparent that the political parties were hardly interested in the young citizens' voices at all. To a certain extent the young users were constructed as potentially future voters, but first and foremost they were seen as school pupils searching for material, for example to use in school assignments. Thus the web site was used as an information desk, providing young visitors with ready-packaged material.

From the producers' perspective it was important that the sites increase the public availability of the parties. At the same time, however, the producers talked about the risk of disappointed users – users not receiving feedback on mails, users having problems with finding things, and so forth. More and more people were visiting the sites. One way to meet the increase was to construct technical applications like search functions and FAQ-section (Frequently Asked

Questions). The idea was that users themselves should be able to reach the information they were looking for. The web sites also had a special site for school pupils working on politics and parties. To avoid getting overburdened by emails, the school pupils were steered to ready-made information materials (about the history of the party, their central issues and messages, and ideological foundation).

Communication between political elites and citizens has traditionally taken the form of one-way and one-to-many, with political elites delivering a well-packaged, pre-approved message to citizens (Chadwick 2006). This traditional pattern seems strong also when it comes to these online communicative practices. The political parties used their websites primarily as a campaign tool to convey political messages. A noteworthy result of the studies of the political parties' websites was that citizens (both young and old) were largely discouraged from engaging in dialogue with the party during the election campaigns. One reason was the risk of having a too heavy demand placed on the website. The users were accordingly viewed as "visitors" for whom the website must provide service and clear guidance so as to overburden neither the technology nor the politicians.

The Political Youth Association Web Sites: Young Users as Community Members

On the political youth associations' websites the imagined user was constructed more as a politically interested young citizen who wishes to discuss politics with other (youths) in the website's community, but also as a potential new member of the association. The youth associations' websites were not as campaign oriented as their respective mother parties. The discourses about politics and citizenship that appeared seem less oriented towards depicting politics as a struggle between irreconcilable interests, in which the citizen is only positioned in the role as a voter. In the youth associations' communities, politics became something that can also be shaped by active citizens working together, and in discussions and debates with others. Rather than communicating ideological messages, the focus was on creating popular website content that attract new and future voters/members.

The political youth associations also campaigned on their websites, but had invested a great deal in developing virtual communities where users were offered memberships. As members of the virtual community, users could receive a personal home-page with accompanying e-mail address, and from this page also participate in discussions with other members. Citizens were given a chance to create their own space as participants in a public arena. In the discussions and chats on the community, communication between users was encouraged. The youth associations' way of utilizing the Web had in this respect a great deal in common with that of the social movements (see below). In the online discussions interaction between users were promoted.

The discussion was first and foremost about party political issues where different political views and perspectives were put up at each other. In the SSU discussion boards, youths with moderate political opinions challenged and provoked, and vice versa. The discussions were often excited and only seldom uncivilised. There were also interactions of more informal character between users who knew each other also outside the online context. The community thus became an important communicative place to spend time with others.

The Social Movements' Web Sites: Young Users as Political Actors and Learning Individuals

The social movements' websites had clear similarities with those of the political youth associations. The imagined user was constructed as a young citizen interested in political issues, one who is collectively involved in activism and discussion. Both categories simultaneously contain two antagonistic discourses: an association discourse and a marketing discourse. In the association discourse the website appears as a forum and community, where citizens are jointly invited to converse and get information about matters of common interest. A community is comprised of its members sharing an identity and interests. The emphasis is on the group and interaction, not the technology that makes the interaction possible. In the association discourse the user is primarily a participating and learning citizen. In the marketing discourse, by contrast, the movement instead appears more like a business in need of an image-boosting website where the users are primarily viewed as visitors and potential new members.

The social movements used the websites to generate popular activism in relation to the issues pursued by the movements. The focus was on coordinating collective activities, as well as getting users involved and inviting them to participate in political discussions. The users were invited to participate in chats and forums for discussions, to use certain services (e.g. news subscriptions), and to become members in the website community. The coordinating function of the site also created mobilizing activities in a physical context, beyond the limits of the particular website. Information about activities, actions, conferences and meetings was given a prominent place in the website design. The sites were primarily used as resources for coordinating the organisations activities (online and offline).

The user was constructed as a political subject capable of and willing to participate and get involved in political issues as a knowledge-creating actor, and not merely as a visitor to be managed and led. The users were invited to provide tips about new links and ideas for further developing the website – they became involved in the production and design of a public arena.

Two Similarities: The Lowly Prioritized EU-election, and Maximizing the Number of Visitors

So far I have focussed on emphasizing the differences between the different web site categories. There are naturally a number of similarities as well, and this section briefly discusses two specifically interesting ones: the low priority given to the EU-election and the general effort to maximize the number of website visitors.

Firstly, it is striking that the EU-election generally was given a very low priority. Elections to the European parliament have also in research been described as “second order elections” (Norris 1997), i.e., elections that are in a subordinate position to the general national elections. On the media corporations’ websites the main coverage did not begin until a few weeks before the day of the election. The information that was prominent was the risk of a low voter turnout. In the end, this turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Also the political parties signalled to users that the election to the European parliament was less important than elections to the Swedish parliament by investing less money and resources in campaigns and the election coverage. The absence of investments also left its stamp on the websites, such as when citizens were discouraged from interacting with the parties. The social movements were somewhat indifferent towards the fact that political elections took place, whether national (2002) or at the EU level (2004). They positioned themselves at a location beyond formal party politics.

Secondly, one can conclude that despite the possibilities for different kinds of communication structures, which web technology makes possible, there was a higher-order interest that to a large extent seemed to determine how the communication was shaped: the effort to *maximize the number of visitors*. In this respect the web can be described as a marketplace where different actors compete for the maximum number of visits (Buskqvist 2007).

User Roles and the Seductive Myth of Interactivity

In this section I will argue that the high hopes for citizen empowerment by interactive features online have been excessively optimistic, at least when it comes to web sites within the realms of the formal political arenas. User roles are encouraged and established in the communicative practices on websites partly through what users are concretely permitted to do (read, watch, listen vs. write, discuss, and vote) and partly through the conditions and staging of the participation. It is accordingly misleading to claim that a knowledge-seeking citizen is established in presentation links and a knowledge-creating citizen in interactive links. It is more complicated than that. An interactive feature is often less interactive than one might assume.

There was a clear difference between the various categories of websites in terms of what sorts of communicative practices that were offered via the

links. *The political parties* focussed on trying to present a positive image of the party and their leading politicians. The campaign focus of the parties' websites, which was revealed in the interviews, was realized through the websites' primary focus on presentation links. *The social movements*, like *the political youth associations*, more clearly combined presentation links with interactive links. Many of these offered the user forms of interaction. *The media corporations* primarily invited the user to participate as audience, gathering information and narratives through presentation links. The users were also invited to participate in various types of interactive features, such as discussion forums, answering questions, taking tests, and the like. Unlike the youth associations and the social movements' interactive features, the media corporations took pains to guide and limit participation such that the users' participation in itself would attract an audience. Participation was made conditional in such a way that it could fit in and be included within the journalistic narratives.



FAQ in Form of a Virtual Chairman of the Social Democrat Youth Association (2004-06-11)

The example above shows a technical function on the SSU website where the user is invited to ask questions to a virtual chairman. The interactive feature is based on a question-answer archive that has been filled with possible answers. Based on the words that are written in the white field, an automatic answer is generated. Sometimes, but only sometimes, the answer became an answer to the question asked.

The political parties' websites included several interactive functions composed of ready-made material that the user encouraged to by, download and in different ways use as campaign material outside the online setting. Users were encouraged to buy things (candy, clothes, balloons, cups, T-shirts etc.) connected to the specific political party. They were also targeted as consumers for downloading material such as pictures, screen savers, music, mobile ring signals etc. The users were also requested to send ready-made campaign postcards via email to friends. This phenomenon evokes a theoretical reflection about the concept of interactivity.

Interactivity is the term that more than any other has come to be associated with the internet (McMillan 2002). Interactivity is often mentioned as a feature that makes up the fundamental difference between the web and other media. The interactivity of the web is actually grossly overrated. If we turn the pages of a newspaper or a book, this doesn't qualify as interactivity. But if we click on a link on a website, many would no doubt claim that we are performing an interactive action. This study shows that in practice the web

often is quite non-interactive, and that many websites rather can be seen as the opposite, i.e. as a variant of mass media logic. The political parties' and media corporations' websites invite users to read texts and view images produced at a central source in a one-way communication model. On these websites, internet use becomes quite similar to the consumption of mass media. The two-way communicative properties of the web have obviously not led to the transmission model of communication (McQuail 1997) losing its relevance (Buskqvist 2007).

There is a prevalent idea that technological interactivity on the web can serve to liberate the individual: the "passive couch potato" is transformed in front of the computer screen into an active, mouse-clicking media composer who creates his/her own media experience and his/her own text. I am inclined to claim that this idea is a seductive myth. At the media corporations' websites it can clearly be seen that the majority of the interactive features offer illusory interaction, where the users' "voices" are employed by the corporations in order to construct attractive websites. Those who control a medium, technologically and/or economically, always occupy a position superior to that of the users (cf. Aarseth 1997: 167).

Politics does not have any self-evident place in the media space and has to compete for the limited attention from media consumers. Thus politics and political communication often attempt to be entertaining in trying to catch the interest of both media audiences and potential voters (Carpini and Williams 2001). This is very obvious in respect to the political parties' websites, for example, in the way texts and pictures are presented in an effective way for maximizing the opponent's mistakes and weaknesses. On the websites there was one attribute that came to personify the attraction and entertainment discourse, namely the interactive functions for games and play activities. In the MUF website the user could play Memory. In the SSU website the user could hunt blue moderate ghosts in the game "Sapman" (an adapted version of the computer game Pacman). The list could be made quite extensive. For the purpose of this text I will only give one illustrative example that captures the essential meaning in this play activity.

In the Social democrats' website during the election campaign 2002 the users could challenge the former Swedish primary minister, Göran Persson, in "the angry game". Users visiting the party website were invited by the text: "Göran is awesome in the angry game. Do you dare to challenge him?" A quick click with the mouse and you were placed eye to eye against the primary minister staring severely at you. The picture of Persson was accompanied with shifting captions consisted of lines from George Lukas *Star Wars*-trilogy like "Watch the master" and "May the force be with you". It did not take many seconds before you realized that you were facing an impossible and potentially endless task.



*The Angry Game Starts... Now! The Social Democrats' Website
(2002-09-15)*

The example illustrates the blurring boundaries between politics and entertainment. That politics becomes entertainment is particularly clear when formats from the popular culture genres is used within the realms of political communication. Göran Perssons' appearance in the television talk show *Late Night with Luuk* (Swedish TV4) was recycled by the web producers among the Social Democratic PR-staff. Göran Persson's folksy touch in the television program and the easy win over the talk show host in the angry game was followed up as a humoristic element on the website. The interactive play function was admittedly merely a minor part of all material on the Social Democrats' websites during the years 2002-2004. But the function is emblematic of something very essential for contemporary political culture: Politic is mediatised, and thus also popularized and personalized. Political communication is based on references to popular culture, celebrities and illusionary interaction with citizens.

In the next section the focus is directed to interactive features online that make it possible for people to interact and debate issues by sending and responding text messages in discussion boards. But, as we shall see, even when it comes to "interactivity as interaction" the empowerment of the user is not a matter of course.

Forms for Interaction

– Designing for Debate vs. Deliberation

A perhaps unsurprising yet interesting result of the comparative studies of the websites' discussion forums was that the forums created on the social movements' and youth associations' websites allowed the users almost unrestricted possibilities to start threads, set the agenda, and decide on the length of posts. The situation was completely different on the discussion forums connected with the media corporations. The media corporations' forums had administrators/moderators who decided which topics and questions would be discussed. The administrators also functioned as gatekeepers, edited posts, and moved them so that they fit into a specific debate structure. These forums also had formal technical limitations of the length of a message.

There are, no doubt, many reasons for this. One of these is related to the question of audiences and participants in public arenas. In traditional mass media (TV and radio) "normal" people have had two relatively fixed roles: as participants in staged interaction and as spectators. In a number of current media formats these roles are less fixed in the sense that the media audiences are invited to phone in, send SMS, and contribute questions. As far as discussion forums on websites are concerned, the relationships between the public role and the participant role are not fixed, but are highly varied. Discussion forums created in a media corporation context are first and foremost created to attract an audience. People's participation in these forums is exploited by professional journalists who are accustomed to having the privilege of posing the most important questions in the public space. The citizens' voices are used by the media corporations in their "desperate search for the audience", to use Ien Ang's (1991) phrase. In the case of the social movements' websites, this desperate flirtation with the audience is not as important.

On the political youth associations' websites, users were authorized with a high degree of agenda setting control. After a quick registration process users could be members in the websites' "Community". Both SSU's and MUF's discussion forum were open for anyone to initiate a new discussion. In youth association forums the number of contributions was, perhaps not very surprising, significantly many more compared to the forums of the mother parties. Here, a younger more computer literate generation were using the website as something more than a site just in order to reach information. The forums on the youth associations' websites were used by the participants as arenas for examination of arguments and competing in debates. In interviews with responsible persons for youth associations' web editorial staff, it was explicitly pointed out that the forums were used in this way. Individuals supporting SSU were initiating and participating in debates in MUF debate forums and vice versa. In the following extract from a SSU forum from September 5, 2002 we see an example of this:

Heading: **moderate of course** 2002-09-03 15:19

Name: lina ingelholm

Contribution: The Moderate is the only right, why are you a Social Democrat?

Rubrik: **Re: moderate of course** 2002-09-03 15:40

Namn: Philip Christofo

Contribution: if I will put forward my arguments, so should you. You should have done that from the start. I don't know if I should continue the debate at the same level by reply: Social Democrat is the only right. Otherwise I can reply that I believe in a democratic way to a socialistic society, a society where we pay for our right to medical service together, where knowledge is for the people, a society where social injustices are fought, not by reduced taxes in any case and neither by dependency of subsidies (SSU forum 2002-09-05).

After an additional four contributions that in a similar way engage in polemic against the introductory message, a new contribution with moderate opinions is published:

Heading: **Re: moderat of course** 2002-09-05 01:01

Name: Rickard Eriksson

Contribution: The sad thing about this debate is that the prejudices about moderate politic are so obvious. When did a Moderate say that medical services not will be financed in common? However that it will be carried out in another way is quite correct. Through placing it on contract. And you, who like the people working in medical care so much. Something I do myself. St Göran's hospital in Stockholm was sold out to a private company. What happened? The satisfaction at work has increased dramatically. This is a fact. No, encourage the power to act and the inspiration in people to form their lives by themselves instead of smothering it. Change government (SSU forum 2002-09-05)!

The contributions are dialogical with questions and answers directly pointed towards earlier contributions. The tone can sometimes be seen as impolite and insinuating but is probably comparable to exchanges of words between politicians in parliament or in a televised political debate.

The forum in Attac Sweden's website was entirely open in that users were given the possibility to freely introduce new topics. On the website vegan.nu users could initiate topics within number of themes, for example: "Politics in general", "Party politics", "anarchism", "Animal Rights", "feminism", "environment", "trade-union work".

Moderation decreases the risk of an unpleasant atmosphere, which can lead to users avoiding a forum. Moderation occurred also in the social movements' forums. Contributions with offensive language were erased, but unlike for example the parties' forums the task of moderation was here delegated to users.

Many contributions appeared on the forums on the social movements' websites could be referred to as "citizen news" or "civic news talk" (Hutchby 2001: 482). The contributions presented personal opinions, linked together matters from news in mass media with personal experiences. Private, concrete contexts were placed in a public, political context. The contributions of this kind are distinguished from the content by professional news producers. Citizens themselves can set the agenda and define what is news and what is not.

Antus Posted: 2002-07-19 17:43

What reports say that the divides have not increased, but contrary decreased, was the question.

[asked].

I guess timbro's [a Swedish neo liberal think-tank (authors note)] editions are seen as propagandistic, which I partly understand (even if Thomas Larssons checking into the matter is well written, thin and can be read for free on the timbro website, www.timbro.se). Hence I search Google for new articles in the matter. It took maximum three minutes to find out: <http://papers.nber.org/papers/W8904>, and it appears to be a solid research paper by a highly thought researcher.

My point? It seems unnecessary narrow minded to believe that it's a truth that the global distributions of income divide are increasing, since much indicates the opposite.

best regards

andreas bergh (Attac forum 2002-07-19).

The contribution in the example above, which was published in Attac's discussion forum in connection to the election in 2002, is not a comment or a reply of a journalistic invitation for debate. Instead it is the user himself who refers to a research report through a link, an intervention that derives from his own perspectives and arguments.

The political parties and journalism offer illusory interaction. They clearly do not want to lose control of the agenda. Interactive features are employed as a popular strategy with the primary purpose of winning citizens' votes and/or exploiting their voices. The institutions' attempts to design and control political communication and social activities encounter resistance from the users. When the citizens are accorded greater control over the Web's arenas for interaction, as on the youth alliances' and social movements' websites, discussions arise possessing more deliberative qualities (Buskqvist 2007). This finding indicates that there is an interesting connection between user control and the deliberative quality of discussions. This connection should naturally be further investigated.

Conclusions

The analysis of the various categories of websites shows that answers to the question of the web's importance for the public sphere need to be based on concrete empirical studies and on an institutional perspective. Websites set up within the framework of media corporations and political parties strive to spread ready-made messages, and partly or entirely avoid interaction with the websites' users. It is a question of activities that aims at displaying and make visible, but neither to open up nor to include. On the political youth associations' and on the social movements' websites, the imagined user is constructed as a politically interested citizen who wishes to discuss politics with other youths in the website's community, but also as a potential new member of the association.

The results from the interviews and website analysis show how the web is used in accordance with the interests of the institutions. Different institutions use a particular form of media technology (e.g. a website or a discussion forum), but the technology is put to use in different ways. Goals and strategies differ among the different institutions in terms of how the websites are designed. This conclusion is admittedly not very surprising, but it is interesting in that it indicates the need not to overlook the importance of the institutions. It is quite simply not productive to speak of "the web" in a general sense without specifying which concrete milieus, practices and places on the web that are meant, and how they are related to an institutional undertaking.

The concept *citizen role* pays attention to practices including civic elements in the use of the websites (cf. Dahlgren 2000; Dahlgren 2003). In the light of this some of the results are especially interesting. First, one can establish that the web is an essential tool for both the youth associations' and the social movements' internal affairs, and that the web is used to coordinate their activities. Second, the web is also an important tool for participating in political discussions. For some, the web appears to be an especially significant resource in that it is used for testing and refining arguments. This fits well with the results of Dahlgren and Olsson's (2007a) interview studies of party-politically active youths.

The citizen roles that were made possible depend above all on the institutions' interests and conception of the user, not on the technical characteristics of the medium. The overriding technical design of the different websites is relatively similar, but the scope of activity accorded to the user and the discursive presentation of the politics are dependent on the institutional frameworks. The use of the Web by media corporations and political parties in connection with the elections of 2002 and 2004 can hardly be said to have promoted a democracy with heightened deliberative features. The imagined user role expressed on the websites was partly that of the information-seeking voter, and partly the spectator of the election treated as an attraction. The websites were used within the framework of a representative view of democracy, or that which Åström (2004) calls "indirect democracy". The social movements and the political youth associations on the other hand used the website also as a tool for civic deliberation.

The web is obviously an important complement to the mass-media dominated public arenas and serves the needs of citizens in areas where journalism and established politics do not suffice. This is particularly noticeable regarding young citizens' possibilities to express thoughts and opinions about social and political issues in public arenas. It is, however, important to emphasize that the web is not a magic technology that will change politics and democracy in any specific direction. Even if it is possible to argue that the Web, together with digital media and interaction technology in general, possesses communicative properties that make it particularly malleable, we can not escape the fact that its future importance will be decided by *how the technology comes to be used* by actors for both production and user purposes.

In spite of the often quite techno-utopian rhetoric of the era of "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly 2005) the web has to be seen as a medium dominated by producers with strong economical, political and technological resources that rather target an audience than invite people to social networking. The optimistic expectations of "Web 2.0", as an architecture of participation where users can contribute and control website content, might be yet another example of a discourse that creates a false, hyper-inflated sense of the value of technology and its impact on culture.

At the same time it is difficult to deny that the potential of web technology for further public political openness and democracy with increased deliberative qualities is greater than that of merely one-way media technologies. The findings from this study have shown that the web can be used in a way that realizes some of the potential, but also that the mere existence of web technology does not create the ideal public spaces as such. The decisive factor in whether web technology furthers the deliberative model of democracy is whether it is designed as a public arena, that is to say, open, public, and visible. Much of what is today characterized as public actually is not, at least not in the full sense of the concept. It is either only accessible to a few, or it is steered and controlled by a particular group or individual (Buskqvist 2007).

Social movements' websites (but also blogs, alternative news sites, YouTube etc.) challenge the mass-media centred public political sphere. The deliberative ideal of democracy emphasizes citizens' participation in negotiations and discussions, but also that society at large can be understood as an ongoing process of discussion (Dewey 1927). In the light of this, a greater diversity of public communicative arenas where also young citizens can and want to participate ought to be considered very worthwhile.

Note

1. This article is based upon data and findings from the dissertation *Voices of the Citizens – Studies of the Internet as a Political Public Sphere* (Buskqvist 2007). In the article themes dealing with the constructions of young citizens' participation was selected from the dissertation.

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Chapter 11

Young Men, ICTs and Sports

Fan Cultures and Civic Cultures

Anders Svensson

Swedish youth – much like their counterparts elsewhere – seldom visit governmental, municipal or party web sites. Rather they prefer to play online games, chat with their friends on MSN-messenger, download films to their computers and music to their mp3 and mp4 equipment, share video clips on YouTube or spend time at social meeting places like *Bilddagboken* (Image Diary) or *Lunarstorm*. Besides this they visit communities and fans sites for media, music and sports (Agebäck 2008). Consequently, young people seem to avoid politics and democratic processes on the internet. Furthermore, they seem to renounce acting in the role of citizens.

Research in the 1990's on young people's use of ICTs was concerned with the practices developing in soap opera news groups (Baym 1998); how community is formed and experienced through online discussions (Rheingold 2000); how media fans' communities are structured and, by means of Bourdieu's concept of taste, how the fans distinguish themselves (Harris 1998); how social hierarchies in the physical world are reproduced on the net (MacDonald 1998); and how norms defining groups' experience of community develop (Watson 1997). Most of these studies were indirectly concerned with the exercise of civic culture but none of them made any explicit use of the concept. Neither did the few studies dealing with sports fans' use of ICTs when they – for instance – dealt with how hockey fans, in their online discussions, metaphorically handled the trauma after that their local NHL team was relocated (Mitrano 1999; Lewis 2001).

In more recent research the concept civic culture has surfaced in a number of analyses (cf. Dahlgren and Olsson 2007a). These analyses, however, have mainly been dealing with ICTs and civic culture within explicitly political contexts, such as political parties' youth associations and various alternative political organizations. As a consequence there are still – after fifteen years of research into the internet's political dimensions – very few studies addressing the connection between the development of civic culture and seemingly non-political internet use. It is this gap in research that inspires this chapter to examine how and to what extent sports fans manage to maintain the quality of their non-political and ICT-based online discussion in order to warrant the survival of the

discussion itself, and also – further – to explore if this potentially facilitates an informal learning of something we might identify as civic culture.

Sports Fan Cultures and ICTs

The development of top level competitive sports into a popular cultural industry has established new forms of fan cultures related to sports. Internationally this phenomenon has been examined and described by Giulianotti (2002), Sandvoss (2003), and others. Brännberg (1996) has suggested a historical development in four steps concerning team sports spectators in Sweden, from the introduction of competitive sports until present day. The early spectators participated in the activities of the clubs during the week but were differentiated from the team when the games took place. The reduction in working hours transformed the sports movement into a mass movement in the 1920's. The spectator in most cases was no longer member, and this separation from the club gave birth to the supporter. In the 1970s parts of the supporters distinguished themselves from the spectators and became fans. The fans went in two different directions, carnival and hooliganism, one a constructive and one a destructive sort of participation.

Figure 1. Changes in the Club-spectator Relations from the Establishment of Competitive Sports in Sweden till Present Day

Time Period	Relation	Character	Activity
Beginning	Member	Difference	Participant
1930–	Supporter	Separate	Spectator
1970–1980	Fan	Distinctive	Spectator
1980–	Carnival/hooliganism	Innovative	Participant
1985–	Activism	Communicative	Participant

With the introduction of ICT-media we can extend Brännberg's tableau with a new level: communicative participation. It all started with the desktop produced fanzines created by British football supporters in the late 1980's (Haynes 1995). Today every competitive sports club has their own web sites for information and communication about the activities of the clubs. The supporter associations too have web sites where the fans can follow and discuss the success and setbacks of their favorite clubs. Also, supporters independently from both the club and the supporters' associations administrate some web sites.

Common for these different web sites is that they offer possibilities for the supporters to discuss the activities of the clubs. Potentially all supporters may participate, from the die-hard fans in the cheer section and the supporter club, to the more distinguished spectators in the seats. The ICT's reach in time and space also make it possible for supporters geographically far away from the club to participate in these discussions. This use of ICTs supports a communicative participation in public discussion about the club and, furthermore, possibilities for the supporters to maintain a virtual community of common interest. Both

these activities could be associated with civic actions and ideals and – accordingly – with the concept of civic culture.

Civic Cultures

The question is if it is possible, not only to associate, but to unite a fan culture supporting an ice hockey team with the concept of civic (citizen) culture? Due to traditional conceptions we are citizens in relation to the state and the political system, and receivers of several democratic rights (Olsson 2002). In this definition, the concept of citizen does not hold activities carried out in associations, unions and general discussions, least of all if they are non-political.

Accordingly, the traditional concept of citizen is a very limited conception. On the other hand authors such as de Tocqueville (1990) and Putnam (1992) point to civic activities beyond news consumption and polling. They have argued for the importance of unions and associations, even the non-political, for the democracy in America and Italy. Such an extended conception of citizen, holding both a formal and informal dimension, is not exclusively bound to the political sphere but also to people's life worlds in civil society. Here people develop and practice an informal civic culture that becomes the foundation for the formal civic role in the public sphere (Dahlgren and Olsson 2007b). "The civic culture...", Dahlgren writes (2004:54), "is rooted in practices and the symbolic environment in everyday life and the civil society". Civic culture furthermore is nothing that just "is". It is rather about processes of coming into being. Within civic culture people become citizens through their experiences of taking part in social change. This can be experienced and come into being in the everyday lifeworlds. In this process media plays a crucial role, in particular ICTs that make human interaction possible.

Communities of Practice

Thus there is a theoretical connection between fan cultures and civic cultures. The empirical challenge is to study how this connection in fact is established. This is possible to do by examining one of the practices, or dimensions, Dahlgren (2004) points out as being perhaps the most important one within the concept of civic culture: discussions. Participating in discussions online involves an informal learning of norms by doing. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualize communicative arenas such as chat rooms and message boards as *Communities of Practice*, where participants learn, not by formal instructions but informally, by their participation. Communities of Practice do not have their focus on learning, but rather the interaction is a learning process and social practice (Wenger 1998). This kind of learning in discussions online produces common norms. These are not directions put on the participants from the outside, but emerge out of the participants needs and create the imagination of a virtual

community (Watson 1997). How such a common set of norms within discussions online are formulated have been examined by McLaughlin *et al* (1993) among others. The researchers categorized how participants in five different news groups conceived disorderly conduct in these discussions. They found seven categories of elements (errors) that caused problems:

Figure 2. Seven Categories of Disorderly Conduct in Discussions Online (after McLaughlin et al 1993)

Element (Error)	Examples
Misapplication of the technology	Repeated postings of the same contribution
Waste of peoples time	Write too long contributions
General violation of convention	Boost for products
Specific Violation of Convention	Discussions for media fans: not forewarn that you will tell about an episode that not all the participants have seen
Ethical Violation	Corrupt somebody else's contribution
Wrong Language	Use wrong terminology or curse
Wrong Facts	Be not well prepared

A closer look at the seven categories reveals a hierarchical order, from simple to more severe errors. The three introductory categories have the character of sources of irritation; ideally they should be avoided but are not catastrophic in their consequences. The three final categories, however, are of a more serious kind. They can be related to the universal pragmatics of Habermas' (1996) theory of communicative action. Here he formulates some basic claims that constitute the prerequisites for participants in conversations to come to mutual understanding. Habermas suggests four claims of validity in his universal pragmatics. The three final categories refer to three of these: ethical violation refers to the claim of veracity, that is the legitimacy of the speaker; wrong language refers to the claim of comprehensibility, that is linguistic and discursive comprehension; wrong facts refers to the claim of truth, that is talking about a common factual reality to be able to reach a mutual knowledge. If the participants violate these claims, not only will irritation appear, but also problems for mutual understanding. This, in turn, subverts the potential for successful communicative action. The discussion could run the risk of collapsing, and thereby undermining any civic potential. The particular participation in public communication and the existent virtual community of interest would thus be undermined. Accordingly, the possibilities for the fan culture to develop a civic culture would be eroded, at least in regard to communication via ICTs.

Aim and Problems at Issue

The aim for this chapter is to analyse how a fan culture related to a Swedish top level ice hockey club, by means of ICT-media, manage to learn and main-

tain a civic culture. Concretely, the use of ICT-media here means participation in an online discussion on the web site *bvfantasten.com*. This web site is independent of the club, HV71, as well as from the supporters' organization, North Bank Supporters.

The point of departure for the analysis is McLaughlin *et al* (1993) seven categories of disorderly conduct in discussions online. The focus is on the three introductory categories of mild violation, here termed *netiquette* (*mild violations*), respectively the final categories of more severe violation, here called *standard*. The following questions will primarily be posed: 1) How and to what extent do participants comment other participants' violation of netiquette and standard? 2) How and to what extent do participants comment their own violation of netiquette and standard?

The first question addresses contributions where participants discuss other participants' violations of any of those issues defining netiquette respectively standard. The capacity to participate in discussions online rests on knowledge about how to behave on the net – and the informal acquisition of this knowledge. Thus, more experienced participants sometimes criticize their own disorderly conduct before someone else does. The second question concerns this latter kind of self-reflexive contributions to the discussion.

A third question deals with one of the seven categories not yet addressed in the two previous questions, namely the question of specific violation of convention: What is a specific violation of convention, and is it related to netiquette or standard, at *bvfantasten.com*?

Specific conventions of a community should be strong indicators of identity, defining the community as distinct from others. Finding out what is conceived as a specific violation of convention in the examined discussion will also indicate what the participants focus on when affirming the quality of their discourse, specifying the sources of irritation, or signaling mutual understanding. This will in turn tell us something about to what extent they are learning civic culture, on the condition that this is promoted by a satisfactory standard of discussion rather than merely satisfactory netiquette.

This comparative analysis is possible to do already by answering the first two questions, namely about participants' discussions of others' as well as their own violations. Answering the third question may give weight to the results in one direction or the other.

Material and Methods

The empirical parts of this chapter are based on a content analysis of 3993 messages posted to *bvfantasten.com* during 149 days, spread over three seasons of the Swedish Premier League of ice hockey. Thematically the messages concerned four major themes: HV71 and ice hockey in general, media reporting, supporter culture, and the debate itself. The latter theme consisted of 400 messages, in essence, a meta-debate on the quality of the discussion. These comments on

violations of the norms of the discussion, constitute the basic data for the analyses. The two initial questions will be answered by analyzing messages dealing with the debate itself. These results build upon frequencies and illuminating examples. The third question will be answered by a complementary analysis of two other subject matters: HV71 and ice hockey in general, and media reporting. These results build to a great extent upon interpretation and argumentation, that is, reasonable suggestions of what seem to be specific violations of convention within the discussion at *bvfantasten.com*. In all likelihood this discussion is not unique when it comes to specific norms of convention, but rather is but one of many such discussions concerning team sports on similar specific conventions. McLaughlin's *et al* (1993) categories have been operationalised as follows:

Figure 3. Netiquette (mild violations)

V1 Misapplication of technology	1 Repeated postings of the same contribution 2 Speaking loudly by means of capitals or exclamation marks
V2 Waste of peoples time	1 Writing too long contributions 2 Asking obvious questions 3 Correcting oneself
V3 General violations of convention	1 Promoting commercial products 2 Posting private messages

Figure 4. Standard (severe violations)

V4 Ethical violations	1 Use of false accusations 2 Anonymity 3 Use of irony 4 Repressive and excluding steps
V5 Violation of language	1 Bad spelling 2 Terminology and grammar 3 Swearing and use of four-letter words 4 Debating style
V6 Violation of facts	1 Preparation and knowledge 3 Rumours and credibility 4 Constructivity and seriousness

The search for indicators of the seventh category, specific conventions, emerged with the analysis of messages concerning the discussion itself, specifically in regard to finding examples of violations that could not be adapted to the other six categories. Then the focus moved to the two subject matters, HV71 and ice hockey in general, and media reporting, looking for messages revealing not expected ideas and behavior that accordingly might be specific for the examined discussion.

Observance of the Netiquette

Surprisingly few comments concern milder violations of the norms of the discussion, that is, violation of the netiquette: wrong use of the technology, waste

of people's time, and general violation of the convention. The question is if the participants never violate these norms or do not care to make comments when someone does. Still, participants happen to post the same messages twice, sometimes three times, in a second. Of a total of almost 4000 examined messages there are 37 double-postings, but not one single comment. The only example is a participant making apologies for a double-posting, still not regarding himself responsible:

It is a pity that the message showed up twice. Yet, I made no mistake (posted by pen name A).

Neither do unnecessary questions give rise to comments. At a few occasions participants ask for information but in a short time report that they have found what they were looking for by themselves, to prevent people from wasting their time believing that the information is still needed.

The average length of the messages is 50 words. Almost 100 messages are as long as 300-1000 words, but only one of these causes a comment:

Are you intending to continue writing novels, send them to a publisher like Bonniers for review. Just let us be spared to see them here (posted by pen name B).

Vociferous messages are frequent, not least when the team is successful. Perhaps this is the reason why they are only very occasionally commented on – three times all together in the entire empirical material. The situation is quite similar concerning private notes. Messages of this kind appear at 121 occasions but are only commented on in four cases. This liberal attitude might be affected by the fact that the private notes usually concern common traveling efforts to away games or to games in HV71's home arena from different places in southern Sweden, that is, efforts to further the support of the team. Neither does the use of the discussion as a channel for promoting products seem to be disturbing, since just one out of 20 cases are met with negative comments:

Could you for once discontinue being here to sabotage. I think that the most of us understand that you administrate a HV71-web site. Furthermore, it's a nasty thing of you to promote your own website on somebody else's home page (posted by pen name C).

Before receiving this reprimand the violating participant had promoted his site for a couple of times without being criticized.

With the intention to avoid wasting other people's time, the participants at 77 occasions correct their own mistakes and violations against the norms. Almost none are corrections of milder violations. In deciding whether participants simply do not commit milder violations of the norms, or if rather they do not mind when it happens, we lean towards the latter. To comment on milder

violation of the norms, that is, to look after the observance of the netiquette, is nothing the participants spend time doing. Under these circumstances not much learning occurs, but on the other hand it does not seem to be needed. Out of 400 messages discussing violation against the norms just some ten of these explicitly or implicitly concern the simpler kind of violation. Apparently, there are more important issues to discuss and more severe violations to pay attention to.

Observance of the Standard

The focus in the critique and self-critique for assuring the quality of the discussion is almost completely on issues fundamental for making the discussion meaningful and furthering understanding. Ethical violation, violation of language, and violation of facts are no simple sources of irritation but rather severe violation of the norms that could jeopardise the ethical, linguistic, and objective standards of the discussion.

Table 1. Messages that, Negatively or Positively, Comment on Other Participants' Violation of the Norms (quantity)

	Positive	Negative	Percent
Ethical violation	31	28	19
Violation of language	24	62	27
Violation of facts	45	125	54
Total	100	215	100

An introductory overview of the messages dealing with other participants' relations to the norms shows that the three severe types of violation are brought up to discussion to a varying extent. Ethical violation is more rarely commented on, usually by way of a positive tone. The positively expressed messages speak in favor of repressive measures, or actions of exclusion. Together with linguistic errors the ethical problems are addressed in almost half of the comments. The other half consists of messages concerned with violation of facts. If we relate factual errors to the universal pragmatics and the validity claims of conversations, the claim of truth, that is, the foundation of the discussion in a factual reality, seem to be the most engaging claim in the discussion at *bvfantasten.com*. Thereafter follows the claim of comprehensibility, and finally the claim of veracity. Keeping to the facts, in a tolerably proper language, and to mean what one says are clearly the most important norms.

Ethical Violation

The category "ethical violation" holds four aspects of ethics: false accusations, problems related to anonymity, ironical expressions, and questions concerning exclusion and repressive measures. Due to the relatively low number of critical

messages, false accusations do not seem to be a big problem. Negatively expressed messages are to be conceived as critique of detected cases, in all three categories, and the single positively expressed as support of the critique.

Perhaps irony should be conceived a language problem, but it is an ethical problem since the speaker does not mean what is uttered:

Humility

It is amusing to read how humble we are right now when the team is so successful (posted by pen name D).

The receiver must be able to correctly decode an irony, and the participants obviously are since 304 ironical messages have resulted in only four negative comments. The fact that there are more positive than negative comments indicates that the irony is an intelligible and fairly accepted genre in the discussion forum. There is only one case out of almost 4000 when someone actually interprets an irony literally. Otherwise, the participants seem to belong to a generation for whom irony is a natural part of language.

Table 2. Messages, Positively or Negatively, Discussing other Participants Violation of Ethics (quantity)

	Positive	Negative	Percent
False accusations	1	3	7
Anonymity	6	11	29
Ironies	5	4	15
Repressive acts	19	10	49
Total	31	28	100

Neither issues related to anonymity seem to be a big problem. Hardly 20 messages, less than one percent of the examined messages, put issues of this kind into question. In one single case someone obviously has posted a message using someone else's pen name:

How cute posting a message in my name, that person must perceive me his idol or something. And he seemed to think I knew everything about hockey! I really appreciate! Thanks (posted by pen name E)!

Otherwise this category contains speculations over who might be the person behind a certain pen name or that someone might use more than one pen name. Yet, no participants seem to fear that this would endanger the veracity of the discussion.

The largest aspect of the category ethical violation has to do with what measures that should be taken against participants who violate the norms of the discussion. Repressive actions by the web master, like erasing violating messages, are very rare and only appear when several participants have urged

for such measures. In the examined data this happens at one specific occasion, namely in regard to 9/11:

Henrik!

I really hope you erase pen name X's message about it being cool flying into buildings. He must be as mentally disturbed as those who committed the attack (posted by pen name F).

Other measures taken to cope with violators of the norms are to ask them to behave correctly or cease to post messages. The most common measure is to make suggestions about ignoring messages from participants who repeatedly misbehave in spite of exhortations to pull themselves together:

... spitting out such rubbish like pen name Y and some more have done only disclose their low age, low intelligence and an embarrassing lack of knowledge about hockey overall. Therefore I suggest that we from now on simply ignore this kind of message (posted by pen name G).

This is usually an efficient repressive measure. If you are met with silence it is not much use in posting messages, irrespective of whether you violate the norms consciously or unconsciously.

Violation of Language

This category contains aspects of language and style: misspelling, choice of words and grammar, bad language and ugly words, and finally debating style, that is, pertinent and creative writing, using an acceptable tone, and not least arguments. The first three aspects do not seem to be an impending problem from the participants' point of view. Eight negative comments concerning the spelling are equivalent to two per mil of the total number of examined messages. The presence of misspelled messages is very common without giving rise to more than marginal critique:

Irritating misspellings..

Hey hello

Remstam and not Remstad...Takko and not Taco. Taco you sort of eat. Petty errors maybe but it doesn't look good (posted by pen name H).

In other words, misspelling does not seem to affect understanding negatively. It appears to be far more important to keep up a discussion that is as including as possible. Several of the participants would probably never have written messages in other media or channels with higher demands on linguistic accuracy. The discussion forum, from this point of view, is an asylum for participating in a public sphere.

Foul language occurs once in a while and is straight away met with opposition. Such language seems to be interpreted as the lowest form of expressive inability and is even interpreted as an indication of mental scarcity of the author. Bad language is more frequent than ugly words. Very often it functions as a fortifier of manifestations of joy. Most often, however, it does not bother other participants that much and the critical comments are therefore very few. Neither grammatical violating results in moral panics, even though the grammatical standard sometimes is subject for more critique than the language as such:

Seats

What's sad in the context is of course that if one wants to change seats there is no other you've got the seat you've got it hadd not mattered if there hadd been eventually 500-1000 free seats (posted by pen name I)!!

Re: Pen name I

It haddd been better if you haddd remained under the cork oak, it's still impossible to understand what you mean (posted by pen name J).

Pen name I's message is a bit difficult to decode, partly because three sentences are contained in one, and partly because it is uncertain what he means with "500-1000 free seats", free in what sense? However, it is very rare that confusion of tongues of this kind occur in the discussion.

Table 3. Messages, Positively or Negatively, Discussing other Participants Violation of Language and Style (quantity)

	Positive	Negative	Percent
Spelling	3	8	12
Grammar	1	8	11
Swearing	2	2	5
Style	18	44	72
Total	24	62	100

When the discussion is scrutinized on a linguistic standard this concerns primarily the general debating style. Two secondary moments of this aspect are creativity and straightness. Creative writing is perceived as stimulating for the debate among some of the participants, while others celebrate a firm and straightforward style. The latter might also be perceived as too a categorical and rough debating style.

More important is the necessity of founding one's opinions with motifs, that is, arguments. This is expressed by several participants both as exhortations and as credit for messages giving proof of good argumentation:

Pen name L

Opinions are divided, but the most important thing is that issues are being discussed pertinently and with esteem and arguments. What this concerns you are exemplary (posted by pen name K).

Pertinence, esteem and arguments.

Isn't it basic starting points for all debates? It's really too bad that only you and I and the rest of the HV-supporters possess a sense of justice that could be identified with this fundamental one (posted by pen name L).

What appears to be the most important aspect of linguistic style, at least in regard to how relatively often it is commented on, is to express one's opinions in a linguistically suitable way. Expressing oneself with impertinence is regarded as an extra grave threat that might undermine the understanding between the participants of the discussion.

Violation of Facts

The category violation of facts contains four different aspects on the factual standard: being well prepared and possessing knowledge, keeping to relevant topics, being credible, and being capable of performing a constructive and serious discussion on a content-wise standard. Being well prepared and possessing knowledge are important qualities. Most of the participants match these criteria to different degrees, and accordingly they are not very often necessary to comment upon. If you are not well-enough prepared there are several opportunities to ask other, more informed participants:

Correct me if I am wrong but was not Örnskog nominated rookie of the year in '95.... how the hell could he then play in the game against MoDo in '92 (posted by pen name M)?

Pen name M

Ehhhh... Örnkie rookie in '95????? That year he won the silver medal in the World Cup and already in '94 in Lillehammer he had won the Olympic gold medal. I don't know for how long time you have followed HV, but his debut season must have been around 88-89, or something (posted by pen name N).

Most critical comments regarding preparation do not concern the central discussion theme, namely the ice hockey team, but rather not being sufficiently prepared in terms of what has previously been said within a debate before one post a new message.

Table 4. Messages, Positively or Negatively, Discussing other Participants Violation of Facts (quantity)

	Positive	Negative	Percent
Preparation and knowledge	6	38	26
Relevance	8	25	19
Credibility	13	15	17
Constructivity	18	47	38
Total	45	125	100

The topical relevance is very often subjected to critical comments, that is, participants who do not stick to the theme or to the subjects that are generally accepted for discussion in the forum. Noteworthy is that not even the members of the supporters' association (North Bank Supporters – NBS) are able to discuss their internal activities without comments. The web site is independent of the club as well as the supporters' association and far from all of the participants of the discussion are members of the latter:

I think that nbs should discuss their shit at another web site!! It is of no interest for us who are not members of nbs and this is a web site for hv and not nbs, so get out of here and discuss your shit somewhere else (posted by pen name O)!

Negative remarks do not only mean critical comments on irrelevant themes, but sometimes also on a too orthodox thematic limitation. Opinions of this kind are also to be found among positive statements on the topical relevance when speaking in favor of occasional topical delimitations of the discussion.

Most of all the discussion revolves around the maintenance of the constructive standard of the debate. If debating style much concerns sticking to the point at issue, constructivity very much deals with delivering well thought out solutions to the points at issue in the common hockey reality. All this presupposes a discussion based upon facts. A discussion based upon fiction is not primarily constructive but rather creative, even if the former does not prevent the latter. A constructive debate also aims at change, first of all of scarcity. Consequently, it should be critical:

I don't know who Alfa is or what he have done but I just wonder if this is a "hate-Alfa-page" or a "love-HV-page" (posted by pen name P)???

...This is neither a "hate Alfa page" nor a "love HV page"!! Read at the top of this page. Hockey in general, primarily HV, but this does not mean loving or having HV as your favorite team (posted by pen name Q)!

To unconditionally "love" the club leads to a non critical debate. Such a debate disregards scarcities in its aim at being positively supportive of the club. Many participants consider the discussion, as we can see, not only a place for a critical debate, but also a place where any one can participate in a public debate on hockey and HV71. They do not hate, they do not love, they are visiting a place for participating in an open and critical debate concerning their favorite sport. Actually, the discussion itself seem to be the message, spoofing a familiar statement from media studies:

Give up? That is exactly what I am not going to do. This is a debate, isn't it, displaying different opinions... (posted by pen name R).

The participants do not pay much attention to the simpler violation of the norms, as we have seen, but focus on the more severe cases. Most focus is on the maintenance of the discussion being pertinent and based upon arguments, followed by being constructive, open and critical. In the following example we will meet a participant who shows that he has been listening to others, taking in information but later have realized that he did wrong and, implicitly expressed, must change himself. In all, expressions of a deliberative debate:

Poor referee, by the way (the referee had decided to help HV). Critique of Beta too for the information that Pelle should not play. Critique of me for trusting in Beta. Take things easy (posted by pen name S).

The pen name criticises another participant but also his own behavior. In the next section we are going to deal with messages where the authors criticise their own messages to the discussion.

Corrections of Own Mistakes and Violation of the Norms

A sign of an experienced participant in an online discussion is the habit of quickly correcting own mistakes and violations of the (usually unwritten) norms for how to behave in a debate on the net. Earlier we noticed the low number of corrections of simpler violations of the norms. Of the totally 77 self-corrections only two could indirectly be connected with the category “wasting of time”. The remaining 75 concern severe violation of norms, particularly violation of language and facts. Here we also find the category “other” and a closer look lets us realize that the cases indirectly could be considered violation of facts: the complementing of information, continuing with too quickly posted messages, corrections when answering the wrong questions or wrongly addressed messages. Some cases could furthermore be considered violation of language: wrongly spelled web addresses, or situations where the author finds it necessary to clarify the meaning of a previously posted message.

Table 5. Different Kinds of Corrections of Own Mistakes and Violation of the Norms

	Quantity	Percent
Language	20	26
Facts	38	49
Other	19	25
Total	77	100

Earlier we drew attention to the fact that spelling mistakes are frequent, probably in most cases due to the fast pace of keyboard writing. Nevertheless, spelling mistakes cause very few comments. The reason for this could be a prevalent linguistic liberalism, but also the fact that the participants now and then correct their language themselves. Here is an example with an ironic touché:

Just want to give a reminder of the necessity of reading what one has written before posting it. Check out the spelling and stuff like that... Sports magazine. Club loyalty. Huge. And do we say "fellt"? Hardly, do we (posted by pen name T)?

The largest category of self-corrections has to do with violation of facts. This comes as no surprise since violation of facts is the category most frequently commented upon in the messages posted by others. Half of all self-corrections concern this type of violation.

Specific Violation of Convention

What could be counted for as a specific norm within an online discussion on ice hockey? Or to take it from the very beginning: what might be a specific norm among hockey fans? Sports fans are generally associated with an unswerving loyalty towards their team. According to Sandvoss (2003) they differ from music fans in that for them the adored artist is someone they "want to be", but for the sports fans the team instead is something they want to correspond to their own ideal norms. Music fans want to change themselves, sports fans want to change the team to correspond with themselves and their norms. Music fans adore their idol as an ideal, sports fans' relation to their team mean, that when it does not correspond to the ideal, it is subject to critique. Nevertheless, sports fans have an unswerving loyalty with their team, and they do not hesitate to direct necessary and relevant critique towards it. The hockey fans participating in the online discussion at *bvfantasten.com* are very loyal to HV71. At the same time they would never compromise with their freedom to direct criticism towards the team or the club when they find it necessary and relevant. Those who only express positive support do not help the team since they prefer to idealize it rather than bringing up the shortcomings to be critically scrutinized. Being non-critical might therefore be considered a specific violation of norms in a team sports discussion.

Is there any violation of convention specific for the online discussion at *bvfantasten.com*? Due to the implicitly critical basic view of the club, the participants are also genuinely critical against the local media: the morning local paper *Jönköpings-Posten*, the local public service radio *SR Jönköping* and the local commercial radio station *Radio Match*. The media critique is overarching and directed towards the national media in general, concerning their knowledge and credibility. However, it is specifically engaged concerning the local media and is directed towards what is perceived to be partiality in the coverage about HV71. The participants find the local media too loyal and not sufficiently critical towards the club:

Then as we know *Jönköpings-Posten* is well known to be HV:s club paper. They have not written one critical word in spite of hovering for 13 years in

the bottom of the league, with three exceptions. Maybe because of that there is so little to read in the match programme. They've got a daily one (posted by pen name U).

The truth is, isn't it, that the HV-maffia has a third member in *Radio Jönköping*. In the south of the county the channel got the nick-name "*Radio HV*". The objectivity in "our" media is principally nonexistent. It seems as if not one critical word should be said or written about HV (posted by pen name V).

Radio Match should not be mentioned at all. They are just cowardly. Should never dare since a commercial station never could perform a critical debate since they have their living from satisfying each and all. Just listen to their Hockey hour that is nothing else than an hour pure PR from HV, no critics, no sound ideas from opinion moulders... (posted by pen name W).

Conclusion

By way of introduction it was stated that this study focuses upon how sports fans maintain the quality of their ICT-based online discussion, and to examine if this potentially facilitates an informal learning of civic culture. The qualitative standard is maintained in the first place by participants commenting upon other participants' violation of the most important norms, violation that could threaten the fundamental understanding among the participants (Habermas 1996). It is also maintained by participants correcting their own mistakes and violation of the same norms.

All remarks of this kind point towards which norms should be maintained and how these norms should be properly interpreted. The fact that the norms are commented upon to a varying extent indicates which ones are more or less important. The comments and the self-corrections not only maintain the standard of those who violate the norms, but are illustrative examples for visitors, furthering their informal learning of the norms. The comments and self-corrections could be said to be the "course literature" in the ongoing learning process of which norms are applicable and how these should be properly interpreted. In this respect, the discussion at *bvfantasten* functions as a Community of practice (Wenger 1998).

Everyone participating in the discussion are, more or less, expected to know the netiquette. Scarcities connected with this are taken notice of to a very low degree or not at all. Violation of the netiquette could be regarded simple violation of the norms, moments of irritation that seem to be of no vital importance. More vitally important is to maintain an ethical standard, to erode down the language too much, and to stick to facts. In other words, to maintain an online discussion that is veracious, comprehensive and based on facts. Violation of these standards could be regarded severe violation of the norms. Most important is to be objective and to use arguments. Then constructive ideas and an

inclusive debate are highly valued. Essential is the critical rationality that could clearly be regarded as a specific convention of the discussion, especially a critical attitude towards the local media. All in all, these might be regarded as norms that have emerged out of the participants needs and create the imagination of a virtual community (Watson 1997).

The discussion at *bvfantasten.com* is not explicitly pronounced as a political discussion, coming about in the political public sphere. It is a non-political discussion among citizens, in Dahlgren and Olsson's (2007b) extended conception, in their everyday life in civil society. Dahlgren furthermore remarks that: "civic culture is rooted in practices and the symbolic environment in everyday life and the civil society" (Dahlgren 2004: 54). Important conditions for Dahlgren, when defining something a civic practice, are the recurrent character and the involvement of certain routines (ibid. 2004: 61). The examined discussion is recurrent, 27 postings a day, and repeatedly visited, 1000 visits every day. The netiquette and norms create certain routines. Discussion as civic practice should also be public (ibid. 2004: 62) and it certainly is, by its mediation on the internet. We can conclude that civic culture most likely is rooted in the discussion at *bvfantasten.com*.

More tangibly put, civic culture comes into expression by the actions taken to maintain the standard of the discussion. If the netiquette points out a code of conduct in order not to irritate other participants, the standard generates a debating code facilitating a discussion among people into a civic practice. Consequently, routines are established promoting the civic cultural character of this practice to discuss hockey. If we add that the participants focus on the objectivity, rationality and the critical potential, when examining their own standard, this further underscores that the discussion is a deliberative civic practice in some respect. Maintaining the standard is a learning process that almost completely focuses on qualities that further civic culture, not least characterized by some deliberative qualities.

The analysis of *bvfantasten.com* is a case study. The efforts to maintain the standard of the discussion however are not unique for *bvfantasten.com* (e.g. McLaughlin 1993; Watson 1997; Baym 1998; Harris 1998; Mac Donald 1998; Baym 2000; Rheingold 2000). Every discussion forum set on survival has to face challenges to the standard of the discussion, particularly during the initial stages. Consequently, one could argue that survival is at least in part a consequence of efforts to maintain a reasonable standard. *Hvphantasten.com* has survived twelve years to date (spring 2009), so the efforts have indeed been quite successful. Other discussions, whether they be on hockey, other team sports, or completely different areas of interest, with some length of activity and survival, could therefore be regarded successful as well. Quite likely the efforts taken to maintain the standard in these discussions have been of similar proportions and quality as in the forum at *bvfantasten.com*.

Consequently, if we argue that the actions taken for maintaining the standard at *bvfantasten.com* are tangible expressions of civic culture embedded in the specific practice of discussing hockey, the same must go for most of the

numerous discussions taking place in civil society. In this way civic culture is not only rooted in these discussions. It becomes displayed to participants and visitors in the messages making efforts to maintain the standard, and in extension, the survival of the discussion. So this display not only gives an opportunity to informally learn the netiquette and norms of the discussion, but also promotes an informal learning of civic culture.

The point of departure for this chapter was the pessimistic view of Swedish youth as avoiding politics and democratic processes, in their renunciation of their roles of citizens. It is true that they avoid politics in the traditional sense, for they tend strongly to visit, in the online context, non-political arenas (Agebäck 2008). *Hufantasten.com* and similar discussion sites on sports, media, music, and other areas of interest for young people are all ostensibly a part of this non-political domain. However, such participation does not mean that they are also avoiding democratic processes, if we recognize that the learning of civic culture is connected to the practices of discussion, which are a part of the democratic process. Learning civic culture strengthens the identity of citizens, within the scope of the extended conception of the citizen.

Taking part in democratic processes is furthermore an active exercise of the role of citizen. At this stage of the discussion we begin to nudge the issue of the borderland between the non-political and the political. We should avoid any essentialist distinctions between them; it is rather concrete situations that become decisive in determining. What we can say, however, is that when Swedish youth join an online discussion similar to the one just described, they actually are not avoiding politics per se, but rather immersing themselves in civil society. They are involved in the very democratic process of learning the civic culture of discussion – central to democracy, to their roles as citizens, and for engaging in the political when it presents itself.

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Chapter 12

Invited but Ignored

How www.ungtval.se Aimed to Foster but Failed to Promote Young Engagement

Fredrik Miegel & Tobias Olsson

It is by now a very familiar and often repeated story that young people, all over the western world, have lost interest in traditional forms of politics and are less engaged in traditional civic activities than previous generations. The themes discussed in the international debate fit well with the Swedish case too, where various commentators have noticed how young people seem increasingly less attached to traditional forms of engagement and participation, such as voting, or becoming members of a political party. In recent publications, however, the American political scientist Lance Bennett has argued, that the perceived lack of engagement among young people to a large extent can be explained by a shift in citizenship paradigms (Bennett 2007a; Bennett 2007b). This means that young people might not be as uninterested as it first appears. Instead, what seems to be a lack of engagement and interest should be understood as a consequence of the shift of paradigms.

Lance Bennett conceptualizes the shift in terms of a movement from DC to AC styles of citizenship (Bennett 2007a: 14). The “Dutiful Citizen” (DC) is the traditional model of an ideal citizenship. Within this model the citizen has a sense of obligation to participate in government centred activities, perceives voting to be the core democratic act, gets informed by following mass media, and “joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize supporters” (Bennett 2007a: 14). The “Actualizing Citizens” (AC), however, are of a different kind and are above all demographically younger than the DCs. The ACs have a “diminishing sense of obligation” (ibid.) when it comes to traditional forms of engagement, they perceive voting to be “less meaningful than more personally defined acts” of participation (ibid.), they favour loose networks of community action, and these networks are often maintained by interactive information technologies. Lance Bennett argues for the need to bridge the gap between the two paradigms, to make mainstream politics, that is politics adjusted to the DCs, a bit more AC-like, and offer the ACs ways to approach the politics of DCs. If the gap between the two paradigms is not bridged the

future does not look bright: "This scenario will do little to bring young citizens meaningfully back to government" (Bennett 2007a: 21).

In an explicit aim to bridge the AC/DC gap – without using that specific vocabulary, of course – two Swedish media companies, *Aftonbladet* and the commercial internet community *Lunarstorm*, launched the website *www.ungtval.se*¹ for the Swedish elections in the autumn 2006. The website aimed to inspire young citizens to pay further interest in traditional politics and – more specifically – to vote in the upcoming general elections. The strategy was closely related to the one suggested by Lance Bennett: To use components connected to AC style politics – young people's preference for interactive media, online discussions, etc. – in a mission to involve and engage young people in traditional (DC) politics, i.e. voting. But how did the media companies actually go about with this mission? To what extent did they succeed? And how does such a strategy seem to work out in real political circumstances? Looked upon from this point of departure, the website makes up an illustrative case of how established institutions aim to involve and inspire young people to participate in traditional forms of politics. The lessons learned from the case can very well inform similar projects in other parts of the western world.

This chapter will analyse the successes and/or failures of the initiative based on a tripartite analysis of the website, which will be argued for more thoroughly below. The tripartite analysis of the website includes 1) an analysis of the producers behind the website, 2) an analysis of the website's content, and 3) an analysis drawing on data from some of the website users. Hence, the empirical material consists of three sets of data: data from interviews with the producers, website content, and a small number of user interviews.

A Tripartite Approach: From the 1.0 to the 3.0 of Internet Research²

By now more than ten years have passed since the internet made its big entrance into society, at least in the western world. The same time frame is also valid for the new ICTs (Information and Communication Technology) big breakthrough within social scientific and humanistic research; in the mid 1990s a rather encompassing literature on the subject started to emerge.

This early literature was richly varied, and included several different strands of research, coming from a large number of different research traditions. A fairly common thread in the early literature was, however, a preference for theoretical and rather speculative analyses of the possible consequences of the new ICT. These analyses were mainly made through reading off the consequences from its form. Some of the most frequent themes in these analyses were the internet's significance for the construction of identity (Shields 1996; Holmes 1997; Porter 1997; see Slater 2002 for an overview), and for the establishment of new, different kinds of communities (Jones 1994; Jones 1997; Jones 1998; Smith and Kollock 1999).

Another area that quickly inspired a great number of analyses was the new ICTs possible political or civic implications. The questions then become: How can the internet reshape the political processes (cf. Hague and Loader 1999; Coleman *et al.* 1999; Hoff *et al.* 2000)? What significance does it have for the late modern public sphere (Poster 1995; Poster 1997)? And in what ways can it remould political communication (cf. Raab *et al.* 1996; Davis 1999) and civic participation?

The early analyses of internet's potential in the political and civic areas – the “1.0” of these studies – had a number of characteristics in common with other, early studies into the internet. One such characteristic was the preference for putting a lot of efforts into analysing how the internet's form – its interactivity, its multimodal character, its integration of vertical and horizontal modes of communication, and its way of reorganizing time and space (cf. Bentivegna 2002) – might help in changing, or reshaping civic practices. A rather typical example is Manuel Castells' (Castells 1996) analysis of the so called “information age” in which the networking character of digital media (nodes, flows, hubs etc.) is predicted to become the logic that dominates all spheres of society, and among them also the political and civic spheres. Another example is of course the many analyses that took the internet's interactive features as point of departure for wide-ranging speculations about its ability to foster civic participation.

This rather abstract theorizing is not the complete history of the field. It is still rather lively. It is, however, reasonable to claim that most studies have started to take on a different, less speculative character in which empirical arguments, from various sources, have been given further importance – the “2.0” of internet research. We will shortly review some of these studies from this later generation of analyses into the internet's political and civic dimensions, exemplifying the important areas.

Analysing Political and Civic Implications: Content, Users and Producers

A frequent theme in the studies of the internet's political implications has been various studies focusing mainly on internet *content*. These studies have covered areas such as the political parties' presence on the net (Nixon and Johansson 1999; Löfgren 2000; Norris 2002; Gibson *et al.* 2003), and the possibilities for and practises around citizens' political interaction on the internet (cf. Tsagarousianou *et al.* 1998; Wilhelm 2000). So far there has been a rather obvious bias towards studies focusing on formal politics, but lately – however – additional interest has been paid to different kinds of alternative politics. One such example is a very recent analysis of a fan forum as a public sphere (Svensson 2007; see also Svensson in this volume), and other examples are the analyses focusing on various alternative political organizations (cf. Kavada 2005; Cammaerts and van Audenhove 2003), which map how these movements appear on the internet and make use of the new ICT in their political practises.

The studies of *users* have been rapidly evolving during the last couple of years in the analyses of the internet's implications. A number of such analyses (including parts of this chapter) are based on research projects that focuses on how the internet is shaped into a resource for political deliberation and coordination among members of various political organizations (Olsson 2006; Olsson 2007b; Dahlgren and Olsson 2007). But the political implications of internet use can for instance also be traced in a number of statistical studies of internet use (cf. Internetbarometer 2002-2004; Bergström 2005; Livingstone and Bober 2005). These studies show how internet use has evolved over time among different groups of citizens, and they make it rather obvious that only a comparatively small part of the general use of the internet can be described as exclusively civic, or politically relevant use of the new ICT. Another kind of studies related to the political implications of internet use is found in the international efforts to highlight digital divides (cf. Norris 2002; Warschauer 2003; van Dijk 2005).

In general, little effort has been put into analysing the *producers* of internet content. It probably has to do with the internet's specific characteristics that make all users possible producers. Anyhow, the general perception of researchers seems to have been: "Why bother analysing producers per se when all users are potential producers themselves?" This certainly counts for the studies into the internet's civic and political dimensions. Compared to how traditional mass media have been studied over the years, this negligence is somewhat surprising. When it comes to mass media research, the producer perspectives are ubiquitous (cf. Gans 1979; McManus 1994; Carpentier 2005). Even if there are a couple of exceptions in the area of internet research too, a few studies that in fact have paid heed to the production of politically relevant internet content (Meikle 2002; Garcelon 2006; chapters in McCaughey and Ayers 2003; de Jong *et al.* 2004; Latham and Sassen 2005), most studies within this area are usually – and somewhat ironically – occupied with analysing the ways in which actors within the sphere of traditional media appropriate and make use of new, digital technologies (Boczkowski 2002; Deuze 2007).

From 2.0 to 3.0

In general, this second wave of research into the internet's political implications – its "2.0" – has obviously done a lot to qualify our arguments about the internet's political and civic potential. There is no doubt about that. To a varying extent the politically related internet content per se, as well as the users and – at least to some extent – its producers have been subject to critical analyses from different researchers, and from various points of intellectual departure.

Such a division of labour is not necessarily a good thing, however. The analytical separation of the different parts of the political, and/or civic internet, might contribute to the constitution of separate fields of research where, for instance, researchers paying attention to civic content on the internet might end up ignoring the fact that this content actually is made use of in different ways by different users, or that researchers that pay attention to producers of civic

web content end up ignoring the actual textual materiality of the producers' work. Instead, we suggest it would be valuable to include all three aspects into the same analyses of the political and civic dimensions of the internet more often than is the case today. More concretely, what we suggest are a tripartite approach that accounts for all three aspects at one and the same time. This might, arguably, be one step towards the "3.0" of research into the internet's political and civic implications. The remaining parts of this paper will illustrate such an approach by help the analysis of the website *www.ungtval.se*. The analysis includes producer interviews, the actual website content as well as a few interviews with users. To what extent does *www.ungtval.se* manage to bridge the abovementioned gap between DC style politics and ACs?

The Producers – "Teaming up with Young People in Politics"³

www.ungtval.se was not produced by a political organization with any explicit political aim. It is instead the result of a joint venture between the tabloid newspaper – and media company – *Aftonbaldet* and the youth-oriented commercial internet community *Lunarstorm*. The website's target groups were primarily first time voters and secondarily the first time voters for the next election. This means that the target group was 15-22 years old. *Ungt val* started in time for the Swedish elections in 2002. By then it was a large project involving several different activities, aiming at making young people interested in politics. In time for the elections in 2006 the project *Ungt val* became completely web based.

The fundamental ideas for the website were very explicit. The editors in chief for the two media companies cooperating in the project – Kalle Jungkvist from *Aftonbladet* and Rickard Ericsson from *Lunarstorm* – published them in a mission statement on the website:

Unfortunately the first time voters, the young people, have a hard time making themselves heard in the public sphere. The older generations usually claim that "young people" are not engaged.

But that is not the case. Instead, older people have problems identifying this engagement since young people's engagement has taken new directions.

Young people born in the 80s are the first generation that has grown up with the internet, and also perceives net as a natural part of everyday life. [...] It is also on the internet that they think and express their thoughts about things that are important to them [...]

Ungt val wants to make these discussions parts of the general debates in society. That is why we have chosen to cooperate – *Aftonbladet* with its price winning journalism and *Lunarstorm* with its unique ability to engage young people and make them come together.

[...]

By visiting the website, to read, to discuss, and to vote you give us the opportunity and the necessary strength to put the established politicians against the wall. Then we can put young people's issues on the agenda in ways that make it impossible for the political parties to ignore them. Thereby we could put an end to the discussion about the "unengaged" young people.

And that would not be one day too early.

The website took a very obvious "from AC to DC style politics"-approach. The editors wanted to join forces with young people in the public sphere, especially by putting their issues on the agenda. This view of the producers' ambitions with the website also resounded in the interview with Anders Thoresson, editor of *www.ungtval.se*. The ambition was, he said, to show that *Aftonbladet* and *Lunarstorm* take young people and their issues seriously, and to help young people out by offering them a space for their issues, and to "put young issues on the political agenda".

In doing this *www.ungtval.se* had access to really extensive resources in the production of the website, at least compared to most other websites aiming at inspiring engagement among young people. The website had two large media companies backing it up, but also advertisers paying for the young voters' attention. These financial resources quite obviously helped in shaping a professional organization around the website. The website had an editor, Anders Thoresson, who was hired by *Aftonbladet*, and was in charge for the everyday action on the website, at least for its editorial parts. The other company in the joint venture, *Lunarstorm*, governed the spaces for debate and discussion.

When Anders Thoresson was asked to comment on the website's resources, he counted to ten people involved in the production. In this group one professional reporter was included, who did research and wrote articles for the website, but also technical staff and salesmen. The observations of the debates and discussions, however, indicated that the figure "about ten" persons was a bit low. In fact, a lot of additional people took part in the production of the website in the role as moderators. Each theme in the discussion had its own moderator, and if the moderators had been included in Anders' notion of "staff" approximately somewhere in between 20-30 people were at least semi-professionally involved in the team producing the website. Hence, it became fairly obvious that the website was a professionally produced product, and for a website the editor had extensive resources at his disposal.

Overall, the production of *www.ungtval.se* was to a great extent inspired by the logic of consumer demand (Raboy 1998). The production of the website started off with a big survey, in which the website's target group's political preferences and areas of interest were monitored. The website was then shaped, or produced, according to young people's preferences as they appeared in the survey. An important part in this was the production of editorial texts to cover the political areas that the young people participating in the survey pointed out as prioritised. These articles were to a large extent based on interview

material from focus group interviews that were put together by the website's production team on various locations in Sweden. The editorial material based on young people's views was also complemented by editorial texts in which the big political parties were invited to comment on their respective views of the first time voters. All together, the editor, Anders Thoresson, referred to these parts of the editorial material as the "essence" of the website.

The website was obviously a combination between, on the one hand, a professional editorial product and – on the other hand – a product produced by the users themselves. The user involvement in the production of the website was expressed differently at different stages. They were first involved as "experts" in the survey, in which their preferences were monitored in order to inspire the production of editorial content. Moreover, they participated as interviewees in the focus group interviews conducted in order to collect journalistic material for the website. Other than this, they were also "active content providers" through their participation in the website's debates and discussions. All together, this could be interpreted as a rather inclusive approach, where the young target group was invited to become co-producers of the website's content. On the other hand, it is just as possible, or perhaps even more plausible, to interpret the producing practises around *www.ungtval.se* as a rather obvious case of adjusting to consumer demand, but in the sphere of politics: "Let the users decide..."

General View of the Internet

The producers' general view of the internet was not made explicit. Despite this, a general view of the internet as an ICT emerged from their ways of talking about their own website and their production practises. The emerging view held one specifically interesting dimension, namely that the website producers had a generational view of the internet – they interpreted the internet mainly as a medium for young people.

Their generational view of the internet appeared especially obvious in the chief editors' description of their intentions with the website:

Young people born in the 80s are the first generation that has grown up with the internet, which also sees the net as a natural part of everyday life. [...] It is also on the internet that they think and express their thoughts about things that are important to them – about everything from reality-TV to political issues.

To start with, the "Young people born in the 80s" are here constructed as a generation of young people that have a number of things in common, that make them distinctively different from all other generations. The producers also suggest that this generation has an almost natural relation to the internet. In the extract the internet is described as the medium through which this generation "think[s] and express[es] [its] thoughts about things that are important to [it]". Obviously, these ideas are very similar to the construction of an "electronic

generation”, created by the new ICT. From this construction of an electronic generation follows a view of the internet as a medium specifically or at least mainly for the young generation (Buckingham 2006).

The Website

– “They Need to be Amused in Order to be Informed”

Compared to this producer view of the website, that it should “join forces with young people in the public sphere” by “putting their issues on the agenda”, its content was rather surprising. On the website, as we will see, politics was rather exclusively defined as an issue of party politics, and the young users – “with new ways of expressing their political thoughts” – were constantly asked to decide for which of the already existing political parties that fits them the best. The concordance between producer ideas and the actual website content was obviously not that big. It was equally obvious that teaming up with young people was not the whole truth. It was also a matter of bringing young people back to a specific kind of politics, namely party politics among (and in-between) already established political parties.

The Website – A Thick Description



Note: Screen shot of www.ungtval.se from April 2007.

Top left on the first page the users found *Ungt val*'s logo, a grey circle, shadowed at the centre, stating "*Ungt val 2006*". Right below the circle a grey rectangle presented the companies producing the website – *Aftonbladet* and *Lunarstorm*. The logo also appeared on the right side frame of the first page (it does not appear in this screen shot). Here the logo alternated with information from a survey of young people's political opinions that was conducted by the website producers, telling for instance that: "49% of young people in Sweden thinks that immigration enriches society", and "58% of young people in Sweden think that black working is OK".

Below this switching image there was an ad from one of the website sponsors, *LRF (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund [The Federation of Swedish Farmers])*, and below the ad the young users ran into "*Partikollen*" [the "Party test"] for the first time, but it was also a service that constantly reappeared on the website (see below). The "Party test" told the users what political parties that fit them and their political points of view the best.

The top frame of the first page held another ad, a banner for *Svenskt Näringsliv* [Confederation of Swedish Enterprise]. The sender, however, did not appear immediately in the banner. Instead, the users were supposed to click on the banner and thereby being brought to a website administered by the Confederation itself, informing about its political points of view. Below *Svenskt Näringsliv*'s banner the users started finding the material produced by *Ungt val*. First of all, the navigation menu containing the headings "Start", "*Nyheter*" [News], "Forum", "*Veckans fråga*" [Question of the week], and "*Vad är Ungt val?*" [What is Ungt val?], and we will deal with these links later on in the description of the website.

Below the navigation menu the main components of the first page were presented, a column of news focusing politics with a "young" angle, and a column marketing various activities on the website: "*Veckans fråga*" [Question of the week], "*Partikollen*" [Party test] (again!), and "Forum". The news column linked up with news articles. The articles were composed as ordinary news pieces and paid attention to various political issues with a "young angle". The young angle was constructed using different strategies, for instance by simply making a story about young people, or by discussing a general political issue by bringing young people into focus. A couple of illustrative headlines were: "Swedish democrats are the third most popular party among young people", and "Unemployment among young people is the hottest issue for the elections". The news section also held a great deal of news that were based on material produced by the website itself. For instance, news based on the survey of young peoples' political opinions that was made by the website producers prior to the launch of the website, and news brought from the focus group interviews that were made by the producers to follow up on the survey.

At the very bottom of the news column there were links to the political parties' youth organizations. These links were introduced by the headline: "Put the political parties' youth organizations up against the wall – Now they have their own websites connected to *Ungt val*." A headline that quite obviously resounded tabloid journalism.

At the top of the right column the headline “*Veckans fråga*” [Question of the week] was situated. Every week preceding the elections in the autumn 2006 a new question was launched for the website users to answer to. The questions did of course vary, on a weekly basis, but the general pattern was that the questions covered political issues concerning young people, for example: “Swedish crowns or Euros?”, and “What subjects do you miss in school?” Afterwards, the users’ answers to these questions were graphically illustrated by help of tables and graphs.

Below the “Question of the week”-section the users found headings with links. These links brought the users to other sections of the website, which we will deal with below. Importantly, though, in this section of the website “*Partikollen*” [the Party test] appeared again. It appeared three times already on the first page, and seemed to be understood as a very important part of the website, perhaps even its backbone.

The first page makes a couple of analytical points obvious. To start with, the website was framed within a commercial discourse (see also Buskqvist in this volume), related to news values from tabloids as well as the language from tabloid journalism. The news headlines on the website are very similar to tabloid headlines, being very drastic and exaggerating, and making “big news” out of weak material. Also the news texts resound tabloids in terms of voice and wording, they are very emphatic and direct. Furthermore, the website’s salient ads, from *Svenskt Näringsliv* and *LRF*, quite obviously contribute to framing the website within a commercial discourse.

A related point is also obvious: the website aimed at inviting young people to look at it and also – to some extent – to participate. This is partially related to the overall commercial discourse, which ever so often is used within the media business as a means to reach out to consumers, not least to young consumers. The amusing parts were most obvious in the ambition to have young users answering the vaguely political and rather amusing questions in “Question of the week” but they were also obvious in the headlines and texts inspired by tabloid journalism.

A third point has to do with the ambitions with the website: the producers aimed at joining forces with young people within politics, to help them make “politics” in their own way. However, already the first page must have made the users puzzled comparing it to such ambitions. It is widely known that one of the major problems with involving young, Swedish people in politics is their reluctance to keep up with the established political parties. To really “team up” with young people within politics would then have to mean talking about – and doing – politics in a manner that is different from what the political parties are doing. Still, despite the producers’ ambitions to team up with young people within politics, one of the most salient features of the first page was “*Partikollen*” [the Party test], which appeared as much as three times. The explicit aim of *Partikollen* was – specifically and curiously enough – to help the young users finding out what political party that fitted their political values and interests the best. The website’s underlying, mostly unconscious logic, was then to, first,

invite young people to do politics in their own way, and then to – secondly – basically ignore their way of doing and talking politics by simply pointing them right back to the politics of the traditional political parties' again.

Other Website Sections

The headlines in the navigation menu functioned as links, bringing the user to additional parts of the website. The link "*Start*" led back to the first page, and the link "*Vad är Ungt val?*" [What is Ungt val?] brought the user to a page that informed about the website itself and the ideas inspiring it.

The heading (and link) "*Nyheter*" [News] was important to the website, a part of its backbone according to the producers. On the top of the news page young people's ten most important political issues were presented. These ten issues were top ranked in the survey of young people's political interests that preceded the production of the website, and the issues were: a) education, b) racism and xenophobia, c) environment, d) work, e) piece keeping and defence, f) alcohol and drugs, g) animal rights, h) integration and immigrants, i) equality between men and women, and j) law and order. Each and every of these ten areas had their own headline (that also is a link) that brought the user to additional readings on these issues.

If the user, for instance, clicked on the link "Education" she or he was brought to another part of the website presenting "news" and/or comments on the issue produced by the website's editorial team. The texts on this specific theme had headlines such as: "School lunches make children fat", "- We want better schools", and "Twenty percent of all students are poor". The texts themselves as well as the way they were edited, for instance in their headlines, had quite obvious similarities to tabloid journalism. They also had an obvious ambition to stand on young people's side against school, against politicians and against political parties. While doing that they also, implicitly (and curiously enough), pointed the users in the direction of party politics.

Below the overarching headline "News", there were three additional links: "*Fakta*" [Facts], "*Guld Korn*" [Grains of gold], and "*Partikollen*" [the Party test]. The user who clicked on "*Fakta*" saw the headline: "This is how Sweden works". The headline was followed by this text:

There are many things that we take for granted everyday. When we go to school we expect to have a teacher, and when we are ill we want to see a doctor. But who makes up the rules for how things should be? And what possibilities do we have to make a difference? Politics is a struggle for power, but politics is also all the thoughts and ideas out there about what society should be. [...] Politics is really everything you do and say. Here you will learn more about how to make a difference in your own life.

Below this text, which obviously had more pedagogical ambitions than other parts of the website, the users found a number of links that brought them to

texts about how the Swedish society is organized and how it is governed. They gave short information on the Swedish elections, what they mean and how they are organized. These texts were based on a rather interesting and rather unusual combination of a pedagogical ambition to inform and an effort to amuse; the informative texts were edited in a way that reminded the reader of tabloid journalism, with strong headlines and very emphatic voice. This “crossover” of genres made up a somewhat peculiar mix.

The next heading and link was “*Guldkorn*” [Grains of gold]. Here the production team presented the editorial material that it found most interesting and/or important with reference to the elections. Most of the pinpointed material was produced by the editorial team itself, in terms of various articles, but there were also a couple of texts brought from either the debates on the forum, or from chats between the young users and various representatives from the political parties and/or their youth organizations. The headlines were for example: “This is how we found the right party to vote for”, “The Christian democrats win the elections – on the internet”, and “Here are the small parties aiming for parliament”. Once again, also this section holds a number of examples of how *Ungt val* defined “politics” as party politics despite the fact that the website explicitly aimed at involving young people in politics in a way that was closer their own ways of understanding and doing politics.

The last link (or heading) below the heading “News” is “*Partikollen*” [the Party test] – once again. It is hard not to interpret its frequent appearance, and salient positions on the website, as a sign of the fact that it was ascribed great importance by the producers. Despite the explicit ideas about the website, to do politics for young people, the website kept pointing them in a party political direction: “Find your political party!”

We can conclude this section on the website content by saying that some of the producers’ aims with the website were fairly easy to identify. It was accessible and it did encourage some forms of participation – voting in “Question of the week”, doing the “Party test”, and participating in the debates in the “Forum”. It was also – obviously – set to appeal to young people. However, a critical analysis suggests that two other things were even more striking with the website. Firstly, as we have seen on a number of occasions, how *Ungt val* ended up pointing young people in the direction of party politics, despite the intention to “give voice to young people on their premises”. The omnipresence of the “Party test” and the continuous references to the political parties and their youth organizations (“Putting them against the wall”, asking them to give their views on various issues etc.) were the most obvious signs. Secondly, that the website mainly was framed within a commercial discourse, aiming at making its content both political *and* entertaining. But every now and then the website also drew on a pedagogical discourse that aimed at informing about the political systems and the elections. The flicking between these discourses was sometimes a bit puzzling, but it did tell a great deal about the producers’ view of young people: “They can be informed, but in order to accept to be informed they also need to be amused.”

Some User Reflections: A Website for the Already Active?

The respondents offering user reflections were recruited through *Ungt val*'s web forum. On several open calls for reflections through e-mail interviews, we got only four people responding and being willing to offer us their views on the website. To be sure, four users are not much in this case. Despite the low number of responses to our call, the respondents answering do provoke a couple of interesting reflections. Firstly in terms of the profile of the young people actually answering to our calls, and – secondly – in terms of some of the reflections that they offered.

All of the responding users were in the website's primary age group. They were between 17 and 19 years old. What is most interesting about their profile, however, is the fact that all four of them were already politically active. Three of the responding users were active within the political parties' youth organizations, and the fourth respondent was not yet active but very interested in finding a political party that would fit him. All four respondents were also experienced participators within web based political debates. Except for participating in the debates on *www.ungtval.se* they also regularly visited and participated in debates on the political parties' forums. Basically, the respondents all seem rather "DC" using Lance Bennett's conceptualization. This makes it interesting to reflect on the respondents that are not present. To be sure, it might be the case that a large number of ACs were present on the forum, but decided not to get in touch with us. However, it is hard not to reflect on the fact that the forum might very well have been a space that mainly was crowded by young, already active DCs rather than the looked for ACs.

Notably, all four respondents were quite happy with the website, especially with the forum – it obviously fitted the expectations of already active, young citizens well. They all found their own interests well represented on *Ungt val*: "The point in [participating] is to disseminate the party's and my message in order to convince people that there is a political party for them", "You get to learn a lot [by participating] both in terms of facts and rhetoric", and "[the point in participating is to] increase my understanding for other people's points of view and enhance my own abilities to argue."

What about the absent but looked for ACs, then? Well, we do not really know, other than the fact that they did not answer to our calls for reflections. But the fact that the website seemed to fit already politically active young people well – both in terms of the content analysis above and the reflections offered by already active (DC) young people – certainly suggests that the website was much more DC and far less AC than it was supposed to be according to the producers' ambitions.

Conclusion

The title of this chapter, “Invited but ignored”, has been picked as an attempt to catch the essence in the website. It was the producer’s view that the website invited young people to participate, in ways that they find attractive. To some extent – as we have seen – this also resounds on the website itself. A more detailed and critical look at the website, however, suggests that the invitation was only partial. The website did invite young people in terms of paying interest in their issues, and they did try to put a “young” angle on politics. On the other hand, the open call for young people to participate and “do politics on their own terms” had its limitations: once they were on the website the young users were constantly pushed in the direction of party politics, for instance through the instant presence of the “Party test” and the ways that the new articles were angled – “Put the politicians up against the wall”. Hence, the website actually ended up ignoring those types of “young politics” that did not fit into the norms proposed by established, national politics of the political parties. Our user respondents, however small in numbers, also add to such a suspicion; the young people responding were all active within or at least very interested in – specifically – party politics rather than any other types of politics.

Referring to Lance Bennett’s distinction between AC and DC types of citizenship the analysis of the website conducted here suggests that *www.ungtval.se* was presented as an effort by the producers to incorporate the AC oriented young people within DC like politics. But as the ACs reached the website, they were instantly, almost literally, pushed to go into a DC-direction of established party politics. They were basically invited as ACs, but – immediately, once they entered the website – asked to think and behave like DCs.

Arguably, what we see here is a problem of a more general kind: This is what happens as the adult world tries to approach adolescence by talking their language and imitating their moods – they cannot really get it right: They talk AC talk, but are too stuck within DC-modes of thinking in order to communicate successfully.

Notes

1. The name of the website, *www.ungtval.se*, is brought from the Swedish formulation *Ungt val*, which translates into “Young Election” in English.
2. An earlier and version of this part of the text was published in Olsson, T. (2007a).
3. A version of this part of the text has been published in Olsson, T. (2008) ‘Three Modes of Producing the Civic Web’, *Journal of Youth Studies* 11(5): 497-512.

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The rhetoric on the Internet and its potential implications for the sphere of politics have been especially pertinent in regard to young people. Through the use of notions such as "the e-generation" or "the messenger generation", the new ICT's supposed transformative potential has been identified and discussed. Just based on the title of this book, it might seem as if we are offering a similar approach here – speculative reflections on the significance of the Internet for young people's engagement and participation.

However, the reader expecting discussions on how the various generations of the Web have turned the political and democratic world upside down will be disappointed. What this book offers instead are theoretical reflections on the Internet's civic potential: analyses of policy concerns connected to its development, and elusive case studies of civic websites as well as young people's everyday Web practices. Basically, the chapters in this book seek to analyze rather than mythologize the Internet's political implications for young people.

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