RADICAL DEMOCRACY AND THE INTERNET

Interrogating Theory and Practice

Edited by
Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera

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Also by Eugenia Siapera

AT THE INTERFACE: Continuity and Transformation in Culture and Politics (co-editor)

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1

Introduction: Tracing Radical Democracy and the Internet

Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera

Democracy, mass media, and the Internet

'Democracy' has become a universal signifier of political legitimacy. No major political programme or regime wants to be labelled undemocratic. However, the success of this signifier has far exceeded the success of actual democratic practice. Political systems throughout the world, including really existing democratic systems, are plagued by corruption, non-transparent decision-making processes, hierarchical power distribution, corporate influence over government and information flows, cynical public relations and consultation exercises, capitalist globalization, neo-imperialist coercion, and reactionary fundamentalisms. Moreover, the signifier 'democracy' has been used to legitimate all manner of anti-democratic actions, including state and private surveillance, harassment and silencing of critical voices, detentions without trial, neo-liberal policies, global corporate expansion, and outright neo-imperialist invasions and war. When these political conditions are combined with an ever-expanding consumer culture that promises private solutions to social problems, it is not surprising that many of the global middle classes, including those in so-called advanced democratic nations, are more interested in consumption than in politics. Meanwhile, for those trapped in grinding poverty, precarious labour, and existential uncertainty, the lack of time, energy, and resources clearly explains an absence of participation in democratic processes and a turn to otherworldly fundamentalist religions (Davis, 2004).

However, many 'progressive' civic groups and individuals continue to critique power in terms of democracy, demanding a say in decision-making on local, national, and global issues. By doing so, these groups are fighting for both democratic practice and a strong or radical

definition of what this practice means. Successful critique of the actions of those dominant interests operating in the name of democracy requires that the concept become not only a powerful signifier of legitimacy but that its meaning become (re-)articulated with liberty, equality, and solidarity.

Progressive social actors are not only engaging in the critique of undemocratic systems, but also lead the way in democratic practice. Social movements have been particularly attuned to fostering democratic practice outside state and corporate institutions. The anti-globalization or social justice movement is in particular creating autonomous public space for counter-hegemonic discourse to evolve and expand, to the extent of being able to pose significant resistance to dominant discourses and decision-making institutions.

In spite of all this, some scholars, such as Zygmunt Bauman (2002), believe that the current level of global collective action to renew democracy in both meaning and practice is insufficient to the task. The 'periodic outbursts of protest against eviction from decision making' is 'sorely inadequate' in the face of 'the human misery gestated in the new global ethical void' (p. 218). Bauman argues that

> Diffuse and sporadic 'anti-globalization' protests, however brave and dedicated, are a poor match for the concentrated might of the multinationals, cosseted, shielded and kept out of trouble day in, day out, by governments vying for Michelin stars of hospitality and by the heavily armed forces they command.
>
> (p. 217)

On any account, democratic forces face a huge struggle in (re-)defining democracy, (re-)politicizing populations, and instituting global democratic governance. Central to this struggle are mass media communication systems that largely constitute political signification processes globally. According to many critical scholars, these systems primarily serve dominant interests rather than the 'general public interest'. The subservience of the media to dominant interests has intensified today more than ever. Under the influence of neo-liberalism, media systems throughout the world have been rapidly undergoing commercialization, privatization, and de/re-regulation, and subsequently merging into global mega-media corporations. Critical theorists and political economists have soundly demonstrated how these developments have led to the capture of the media by powerful conservative interests, leading in turn to the marginalization of oppositional and less-resourced voices in the

central discursive arenas of liberal-capitalist societies (see Boggs, 2000; Curran, 2000; Gandy, 2002; Kellner, 2004; McChesney, 1999; Schiller, 1999). These critical commentators acknowledge that space for marginalized voices does open up through communicative practice and the polysemy of mass media messages. However, on the whole, political communities that debate and act reflexively are not being fostered. Rather, the mass media are seen as largely isolating individuals and channelling them to media spectacles, publicity stunts, consumer advice, and discourses legitimating dominant ideologies.

Against these pessimistic assessments of the mass media, there has been much excitement about the possibility of the Internet supporting, advancing, and enhancing autonomous and democratic public spaces. Through e-mail, Web pages, Weblogs, open publishing/editing systems, peer-to-peer connections, Webcasting, podcasting, and other interactive, relatively low cost, and (somewhat) globally accessible computer networked communications, the Internet is seen as providing space for the free flow of information, open debate of problems, and the formation of rational-critical public opinion, all of which enable citizen scrutiny of power and input into decision-making (Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Kellner, 2004; Hauben & Hauben, 1997; Papacharissi, 2002; Rheingold, 1993).

But this strongly democratic vision of the Internet enabling public interaction and contestation of power has largely been sidelined in mainstream Internet-democracy rhetoric and practice. Instead, a liberal-consumer model of politics that valorizes the individual as a self-seeking utility maximizer choosing between an array of political options has become the standard for much e-democracy thinking and practice globally. This liberal model of e-democracy developed first in the United States. It was preceded there by a zealous cyber-libertarianism. Cyber-libertarians follow a fanatically anti-government version of the liberal-consumer model of politics. Any government initiative in relation to the Internet is seen as interference in the individual liberties that cyberspace is believed to deliver naturally. Through its mythological non-hierarchical network of free information flows, the Internet is seen as offering a perfect 'marketplace of ideas', a space for information exchange and individual decision-making free of bureaucracy, administrative power, and other restrictions (bodily, geographical, cultural) of 'real' space (Barlow, 1996; Dyson et al., 1994; Gates, 1999; Grossman, 1995; Keyworth, 1997; Toffler & Toffler, 1994). Democracy here is equated with the liberty of individuals to satisfy private interests. 'Life in cyberspace', Mitchell Kapor (1993) proclaimed, is 'founded on the primacy of individual liberty'. For George Keyworth (1997) 'cyberspace is

the culture and society of people who are individually empowered by digital connection'. John Perry Barlow (1996) polemicized against government attempts to 'ward off the virus of liberty', declaring cyberspace a place of undistorted expression where 'we are forming our own Social Contract' based on 'enlightened self-interest'. The Internet here is understood as a utopian place free of all power structures and constraints on individuals, constituted by autonomous individual interactions.

Cyber-libertarian rhetoric was at its strongest in the mid-1990s, when it gained support from Internet enthusiasts opposed to government plans to censor online communications and to build a separate 'information superhighway'. However, by the late 1990s cyber-libertarians had lost much of their focus of resistance. The United States government had abandoned its superhighway plans, floundered in its censorship attempts, and had allowed commercial interests to buy up cyberspace. Moreover, the overblown technologically determinist utopianism of the cyber-libertarian rhetoric did not spread to, nor convince, either the mainstream Internet population or powerful corporate interests, both of which came online in numbers from the late 1990s. After this time, Internet politics became 'normalized': dominant forms of offline politics became dominant online (Davis, 1999; Resnick & Margolis, 2000). Consequently, the liberal-consumer model of politics that is hegemonic in offline democratic politics now dominates online public-oriented spaces.

In this consumer model the Internet is understood to be the most powerful communications medium yet for providing individuals with information on competing political positions and the means for registering their choices (e-voting, petitions, e-mail, polls). Concurrently, competing political interests are seen as being given a relatively cheap and effective medium for organizing their supporters and selling themselves. In contrast to the interactive and spatial understandings of the strong democratic and cyber-libertarian visions, the Internet here is assumed to be simply an information conduit for pre-constituted instrumental selves to transmit and transact through.

This liberal-consumer understanding of democratic practice is now promoted in many non-government Internet-politics initiatives. From the mid- to late 1990s in the United States, 'independent' (from government) Internet-politics initiatives developed that focused upon providing election information and the means for voters to interact directly with public officials (providing opinion polls, petitions, and systems to send messages to elected officials). Examples of such projects that continue to operate successfully include Democracy Network (democracynet.org), Project Vote Smart (vote-smart.org), The California

Online Voter Guide (calvoter.org), Politics.com, Speakout.com, and Vote.com. While these projects vary in emphasis, they all promote a consumer model of democratic politics, providing individuals with the information to make strategic choices on all available political options and the means of registering these choices. At the same time, they provide competing interests with a platform on which to display their positions.

Established communications corporations and new media companies have replicated the consumer model in their 'political' content and interactive offerings (Dahlberg, 2005). 'Old media' corporate news sites extend the offerings of individualized information services, attempting to capture the attention of users for their patrons, the advertisers. The new corporate portals like Yahoo, AOL, MSN, etc., offer some news and information, but are dominated by consumer services, marketing, and privatized practices, encouraging participants to perform as private, strategic actors. News items are kept brief and tend to promote consumer identities; news can often be found written as consumer advice, with stories sponsored by businesses that offer solutions to problems presented.

The consumer model has also been embraced by local and national government e-democracy initiatives. This is hardly surprising since most 'democratic' governments already embrace liberal-consumer frameworks that provide individual citizens with information on available options, periodic voting rights, forms of direct submission to elected representatives, and service delivery. The Internet's technologies that facilitate debate and enable contestation of power are either ignored or sidelined. Rather, the Internet is employed by governments to simply provide electronic equivalents of their offline services: online information, electronic forms for making submissions and completing transactions, formulaic replies to e-mail, and in some cases electronic voting. In mainstream liberal political discourse, which structures the various information society and e-democracy policies of liberal democracies and supranational organizations such as the EU, these developments are seen as very positive for democracy as they improve the efficiency of the liberal-democratic system.

In contrast, critical political economists and other media scholars are sceptical of, and oppositional to, these liberal visions and practices (Barney, 2000; Fortier, 2001; McChesney, 1999; 2002; Napoli, 1998; Schiller, 1999). They see this consumer model as advancing and legitimizing a very limited notion of democracy, one that fails to provide for meaningful participation and adequate contestation of power. As such, it supports dominant status quo discourses and power relations.

These scholars also see the consumer model as largely ignoring political and economic factors that inhibit democratic practice. Critical political economists point to the limits placed upon e-democracy by state surveillance (rapidly increasing after '9/11') and control, and by the massive inequalities in resources to participate online – the fact that most of the world's population do not even have access to electricity, let alone the skills and equipment required to go online. Of course, mainstream liberal commentary does at times highlight these factors as problems limiting online participation. Most significantly, the vocabulary of 'the digital divide' has entered government policy. However, such commentary normally only yields superficial amelioration strategies, rather than leading to an interrogation of the socio-political systems that maintain domination and exclusion. Moreover, mainstream liberal commentary rarely turns a critical focus on the corporate colonization of online communication – in fact, much liberal-democratic government policy supports the extension of corporate interests online as an answer to digital inequalities. In contrast, critical scholars show that, when not simply turning cyberspace into a shopping mall, this colonization promotes dominant discourses and instrumental politics.

Thus, despite the democratic potentials and practices of the Internet and the hopes and claims of many Internet-democracy enthusiasts, critical scholars argue that a consumer model of politics has gained dominance online, a model that contributes to the reproduction of hierarchical power relations. Alternative, progressive, or radical positions and practices are systematically marginalized or totally excluded. The benefactors and beneficiaries of much e-democracy initiative are the already powerful. Critical scholars argue that the problem here is deeply entrenched. They argue that without fundamental changes in the present hierarchically structured social, economic, and political systems, a failure of the Internet to facilitate democracy is just as predictable as the failure of the mass media to do the same.

Despite the pessimistic conclusions of this generalized systemic analysis, 'radical democrats' of various persuasions believe that the Internet continues to provide space for 'radical democratic practice', including resistance to the dominant relations of power that are structuring the Internet to reproduce status quo social relations. Through the Internet's various technologies of communications and interaction, marginalized groups are able to develop counter-discourses (including practices and cultures) that can challenge and resist domination. But before we discuss radical democracy and the Internet further, we must explore what is meant by the former term.

What is radical in radical democracy?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'radical' as 'going to the root or origin; touching or acting upon what is essential and fundamental'. Coupled with democracy, 'radical' points to a return to the origins of the 'democratic revolution', beyond the limits that have been placed upon it by the major modern political articulations of democracy, most prominently liberal democracy and previously the Soviet and Chinese communist models. Here we are referring to a return to the classical understanding of democracy, which involves the twin imaginaries of equality and liberty for all in the political process of ruling and being ruled.[1] Radical democracy can then be defined as the type of democracy that signals an ongoing concern with conceptualizing and realizing equality and liberty. There are two requirements involved here. First, radical democracy is concerned with the radical extension of equality and liberty. Second, this concern is ongoing: radical democracy does not entail the dogmatic assertion of a set of fixed criteria, but involves a reflexive process by which democracy is understood as unfinished, continuously re-thinking itself. As such, the adjective radical signifies a radical uncertainty and questioning. This formulation of radical democracy leads to two important questions: who is doing the reflecting upon the imaginaries of equality and liberty? And whose equality and liberty are we thinking of? This brings to the fore the issue of the community, demos, or ultimately, the subject of (radical) democracy. Reflecting upon equality and liberty, therefore, necessarily involves thinking about the subject of democracy and the formation of the demos, whose identity is determined through this process of reflection and its outcomes.

As such, only those positions that involve an ongoing reflection on the conceptualization and realization of equality, liberty, and democratic community can be understood as radically democratic. We can therefore discount the liberal aggregative-representative models that dominate existing democratic nation-states because they focus upon only one interpretation of liberty, the negative liberty of the absence of constraints on individual private freedom (Berlin, 1969). This focus reduces community to the aggregate of individual utility maximizers and overlooks positive liberty (the extension of socio-political equality). Moreover, the assumption in such liberal models, that individual strategic decision-making is the natural state of being, displaces reflection on the limits of such models and precludes serious consideration of alternative and more radically democratic systems.

This formal discussion of radical democracy allows for the development of a classificatory scheme that differentiates between an array of radical democratic positions in terms of how they understand the conceptualization and realization of equality, liberty, and democratic community. The importance of examining different conceptualizations is that they lead us to different ways of thinking about technology, society, economy, and politics and hence to different forms of 'praxis' or ways of actualizing radical democracy. Here we will distinguish between three significant conceptualizations or radical imaginaries. Following existing terminologies, we can label these as deliberative, agonistic, and autonomist. Any in-depth discussion of these radical democratic imaginaries (including of particular formulations, linkages, critiques, and alternatives) and their relationship to the Internet is left to the contributions within this book. Here we must limit ourselves to a brief outline of these strands of radical democracy.

The deliberative democratic strand is perhaps the most widely known position of the three, and is arguably enjoying the most recognition within both academic and non-academic circles. The deliberative democratic position, whose most prominent advocate to date has been Jürgen Habermas (1996), revolves around the idea that political problems (that is, problems concerning the organization of life in common) can be resolved through the force of the better argument: through people coming together and deliberating upon the best way to resolve particular disputes. Political community is therefore based upon communicative reason: the critical reflexive process of coming to the most reasonable solution (consensus) to a common problem, in contrast to the pre-deliberative, individual-strategic reasoning of liberalism. Although Habermas accepts that different communities are bound by different cultures, ethics, and so on, he argues that communicative reason offers the means by which we can arbitrate between opposing ethics and interests. Moreover, communicative reason leads to power being both held accountable to and legitimated by deliberative based public opinion. This deliberation is established through appropriate procedures that seek to institute equal and free participation. Equality and liberty are at once the premises of the deliberative public sphere and central to its focus. Deliberations presuppose free and equal participation, and hence procedures that attempt to ensure this. At the same time, given power relations, participating in actual rational-critical deliberations should lead to the questioning of any limitations on equality and liberty in a deliberative situation.

The agonistic perspective, most commonly associated with the work of Chantal Mouffe (2000a, 2000b; and Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 1987),

takes a different and often opposing view to the deliberative one. Its starting premise is the radical instability of the social conceived as primarily antagonistic. People are deeply embedded in different communities, and they hold passionate attachments to conceptions of the common good which they cannot and should not give up (Mouffe, 2005). Relations and identities within and between communities are politically and historically constituted and understood as 'radically contingent', that is, not formed on a fundamental class relationship or any other identity or classification such as 'race', but rather as a result of a complex set of articulations existing on a given socio-historical horizon. The subject cannot be conceived of as a unitary and rational agent as in liberalism and liberal democracy: rather we all occupy different socially constituted subject positions. Communities are plural and relations between them are not just marked by incommensurabilities but are often antagonistic: but rather than rejecting or, worse, suppressing this antagonism, the agonistic position considers it as fundamental to politics and its dynamism. Indeed, the domain of 'the political' (ontological level) is understood as primarily antagonistic, leading to 'politics' (ontic level) being characterized by dissent and division – consensus cannot ever be fully 'achieved', agreements are contingent and strategically formed, and any talk of total consensus is dangerous as it equates with the end of politics (Mouffe, 2000a). Power is, in these terms, the exercise of hegemony, that is, the temporary fixing of the meaning of social relations. Equality and liberty do not refer to any transcendental values, laws of nature, or linguistically embedded pre-suppositions, but rather to a set of 'empty signifiers' which have acquired meaning due to specific historical situations and struggles.[2] The political project of agonistic radical democracy is, in these terms, to create a hegemony, an alliance between different struggles that are constructed as equivalent, which can then extend the meaning of equality and liberty to a wider range of social relations. This movement would involve the occupation, albeit temporarily, of the space of the universal by a particular political content, which although universalist in intent, can never capture the complete and elusive 'wholeness' of the social. Political participation is then understood as participation in these struggles from different subject positions; the new social movements present a particularly apt illustration of agonistic radical democratic struggles because they engage in political struggle to reclaim and extend the meanings and practices around freedom and equality.

The autonomist strand, steeped in left-communist and critical Marxist traditions, is developed more comprehensively and more recently in the

work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004), with earlier theorists, most notably Cornelius Castoriadis (1991, 1997) and Claude Lefort (1986)[3] also situated as part of this strand. Perhaps the most significant point of divergence between this and the two strands described above is to do with community. Rather than being a collection of rational individuals, rational discursive publics, or a set of strategically articulated and antagonistic groups, community is theorized in autonomism as pure power: constituent power or *potenza* in Negri (1999), instituting power or the social-historical in Castoriadis (1997). This is not to imply that there is no power in the repressive or dominating sense: indeed, constituted power, or *potere*, represents the dominating elements of what was at one point constituent power. The agent of constituent power, the 'community' itself, is theorized as 'the multitude' to reflect first its irreducible plurality and second to mark its difference from previous theorizations, such as 'the people', 'the masses', or 'the working class'. The multitude can reclaim its constituent power through actively discovering and creating commonalities. The notion of the multitude as both irreducible plurality and constituent power of the common points to the autonomist understanding of equality and liberty: individual liberty is found in the multitude as the container (and originator) of singularities; social liberty (or freedom) is found in restoring to the multitude its autonomy, creativity, and constituent power; finally, equality is catered for, at least insofar as the multitude is an all-inclusive formation incorporating all forms of life (and more broadly all forms of social production).

The creative and imaginative aspects of politics are central to the autonomist accounts of both Negri and Castoriadis and, as a consequence, the separations between the domains of politics, society, the economy, and culture are actively questioned. In other words, 'the political' is conceptualized as a productive 'biopolitics' that poses all aspects of life as political questions. This opens up the possibility of an active and ongoing critique against capitalism and the politico-institutional frameworks that support it. Participation in this case reflects not only equality as part of the multitude but also as part of the struggles of the multitude against capitalism and the political formations it supports;[4] as such, it is significantly broadened, as it spans all these domains. The project of the multitude is democracy itself, an ongoing adventure (Lefort, 1986) that must restore the creative force belonging to all of us. And this reclaiming of the multitude's power necessarily involves the formulation of an adequate response to capitalism. The formulation of critical responses to capitalism and its associated institutional

frameworks point to a crucial aspect of radical democracy: the critique of the limits placed upon interpretations of equality, liberty, and community by crystallized, or sedimented, politico-economic forms.

Radical democracy and the Internet: Four themes

It is within the context of these three radical democracy imaginaries that we locate our reflection on the Internet, broadly conceived.[5] Communication is central to all radical democracy imaginaries, theories, and practices. And Internet communication has emerged as an important means of furthering the depth and breadth of democracy, and extending understandings and practices of political equality, liberty, and community. This relationship between radical democracy and the Internet is the focus of this book. The collection interrogates the relationship along four inter-related lines or themes: radical democratic theory, online community, the communicative contestation of power relations, and the systemic structuring of the Internet.

First, the Internet encourages the interrogation and development of radical democratic theory. Contributors advance and interrogate a range of radical democratic theories that relate in various ways to the three imaginaries discussed above. These include those that emphasize debate and participation (Hands, Downey), those that argue we must theorize the normative role of conflict as an essential part of any democracy (Dahlberg, Dahlgren, Jordan), and those that point to and critically explore a more materialist and communal basis for democracy (Dyer-Witheford). While Habermas and Mouffe, and Negri to a lesser extent, are central figures in the discussion, other representatives of different radical democratic traditions are critically drawn on by contributors, including Dewey and Debord (Kahn & Kellner), Castoriadis (Siapera), de Certeau (Franklin), Foucault (Poster), Žižek (Dean), and Arendt (Barney).

The second broad area of interrogation in this collection is the question of how the Internet operates not only as a conduit of communication but also as constitutive of alternative political communities, new subject positions, new possibilities for acting in concert, and ultimately radical new democratic cultures that challenge dominant political assumptions. Here contributors discuss the practices afforded by distributive, open, collaborative systems (blogs, wikis, file-sharing, and the various technologies of hactivism), as compared to more centralized, proprietary, mass-consumer-oriented Internet technologies (see in particular Jordan, Kahn & Kellner, Poster). The emerging communities are

contingent and often loose and ad hoc, but nevertheless converge around specific issues such as globalization and social injustice (see in particular Dahlgren, Kahn & Kellner), post-colonialism (Franklin), Islam (Siapera), freedom of communication (Jordan), music (Poster), neo-fascism (Dahlberg, Kahn & Kellner) and war (ibid.). Herein lies the possibility of thinking another world is possible, and the basis for theorizing radical democratic community.

Third, contributors examine the way in which the Internet directly strengthens the voice of alternative, marginalized, or otherwise oppressed groups, by supporting the contestation of dominant discourses and power structures. How this takes place is discussed in a number of ways: activism within cyberspace through an array of hactivist strategies either aimed at disrupting the online communications of anti-democratic forces or at altering the Internet's infrastructure to increase online communicative freedom (Jordan); online critical publicity that communicates 'alternative' perspectives and interrogates power (Dahlberg, Hands, Franklin); and Internet-based organizing of offline actions against domination, especially with respect to the anti-globalism or global social justice movement (Dahlgren, Kahn & Kellner). Contributors refer to the importance of the Internet's distributed communications supporting the articulation, development, and mobilization of counter-discourses and identities prior to these actions (see, for instance, Franklin on post-colonial positions, and Siapera on Muslim voices). This discussion includes consideration of reactionary, anti-democratic identities that contest dominant discourses, as many 'alternative' ideological struggles are far from progressive (Dahlberg, Downey, Kahn & Kellner, Siapera).

Our reflections on these practices once more feed into the radical democratic theorizing in theme one. For many of the contributors here, some form of critical publicity and/or emphasis on activism, both online and offline, emerges as central to radical democratic theory. Critical publicity is aimed at generating alternative responses and new voices, while also questioning existing power arrangements and hierarchies. As such, it clearly overlaps with the emphasis on activism, which contributors generally theorize as involving the combination of symbolic and material resources in contesting power, while *democratic* activism is specifically conceptualized in terms of the realization of equality, liberty, and community.

Fourth, contributors consider the ways in which particular political, economic, and cultural conditions and power relations (especially global capitalism) effect and affect the actualization, as well as the very constitution, of radical democratic imaginaries through the Internet.

For a start, we must always keep in mind the structural inequalities that exclude much of the world's population from simply getting connected to the Internet, let alone from going online on an equal participative basis with others (see in particular Downey's contribution). The closest many of the world's population come to participating in cyberspace is as assembly line labourers or computer parts recyclers. However, in the context of the corporate domination of cyberspace we must ask to what extent calls for universal access simply act as promotional vehicles for capitalist ideology; that is, as calls for the further insertion of all peoples and aspects of life into an instrumentalist consumer culture, resulting in the further commodification of self and the stripping of cultural wealth and diversity (see Barney's contribution). 'Techno- or communicative capitalism' is such an effectively hegemonic system that it can even appropriate the Internet's seemingly 'alternative' practices based on decentralized and distributed networks (see Dean's critique). We see this happening in the case of peer-to-peer and community networking systems; as for example in the takeover of the celebrated community social software system MySpace by Murdoch's News Corp (see Barney). Hence, as well as deploying the Internet to fight for democracy, there needs to be a politics of technology that will fight for a democratic Internet! The Internet is not *essentially* democratic: rather, as acknowledged throughout the book, it is a contested terrain. As well as democratic communities and movements, anti-democratic forces – conservative, totalitarian, patriarchal, fundamentalist, militaristic/terrorist and, in particular, capitalist – all seek to control and deploy the Internet for their own ends through a range of hegemonic strategies. In contrast to such politics, and in order to contribute to the opposition to these reactionary forces, this book focuses attention upon the liberatory potential of the various theories and practices of radical democracy as they are articulated with the Internet.

Through critical explorations of these four overlapping themes, this book aims to advance thinking and practices on what can be done to develop radical democratic cultures through networked systems. We do not aim to provide a total coverage of theoretical and empirical issues. Rather, the aim is for the book to be a significant contribution to moving the field in a 'progressive' direction, not just through the particular theorizations of contributors, but by provocation. Accordingly, we invite readers to find points of disagreement and agitation that will motivate them to engage with these contributions, and thus stimulate the ongoing process of re-orienting and developing Internet debates and practices in radical democratic directions.

Notes

We wish to thank Josh Dahlberg, Joss Hands, and Sean Phelan for their helpful comments on this introduction.

1. See, for instance, Aristotle's *Politics* (Book VI, 1317b, p. 144): 'The basis of a democratic state is liberty; […] One principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn, and indeed democratic justice is the application of numerical not proportionate equality; […] Every citizen, it is said, must have equality […] This, then, is one note of liberty which all democrats affirm to be the principle of their state. Another is that a man should live as he likes. This, they say, is the privilege of a freeman, since, on the other hand, not to live as a man likes is the mark of a slave. This is the second characteristic of democracy, whence has arisen the claim of men to be ruled by none, if possible, or, if this is impossible, to rule and be ruled in turns; and so it contributes to the freedom based upon equality.'
2. See, for instance, Laclau & Mouffe (1987) and the chapter on 'Hegemony and Radical Democracy' in Laclau & Mouffe (1985), in which they locate the project of radical democracy as part of the democratic revolution more broadly conceived.
3. Autonomist radical democracy is understood here as a broader category that includes those authors concerned with the question of democracy from the perspective of autonomy – as such it incorporates, but is not limited to, the Italian autonomia movement associated with Negri, Virno, Tronti, and others. For more details, see the collection by Virno & Hardt (1996).
4. Hardt & Negri (2000) have famously theorized the current expanding and deterritorialized political power or sovereignty as Empire.
5. The term 'Internet' is here being used interchangeably with Net, cyberspace, Web as a metaphor for digital networked communications more generally.

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2
Globalization, Technopolitics, and Radical Democracy

Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner

> A community will evolve only when a people control their own communication.
>
> Frantz Fanon

Introduction

As the third millennium unfolds, the unrelenting expansion and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is continuing to transform the ways that people work, communicate with each other, and spend their leisure time. Moreover, computer, information, communication, and multimedia technologies are key aspects of the production of an emergent economy described as postindustrial, post-Fordist, and postmodern, as it is accompanied by a networked society, cyberspace, and the juggernaut of globalization. There are, of course, furious debates about how to describe the Great Transformation of the contemporary epoch – whether it is positive or negative, whether it is indeed a 'new' economy at work or is simply a version of the old economy and society, and whether there are significant political prospects for democratization and radical social transformation, or accelerating crises of democracy, terrorism, war, and environmental degradation.[1]

In this chapter, we engage some issues involving globalization, technological revolution, and radical democracy. Globalization and the rise of an emergent information and communication technology based economy and society is interpreted in both popular and academic literature as a mode of technological revolution in which mushrooming ICTs are transforming every mode of life from how individuals do research to how people communicate and interact socially.[2] There is some truth in this

notion, but it is also true that the technology proliferation perpetuates the interests of the dominant economic and political powers, intensifies divisions between haves and have-nots, and is a defining feature of a novel and ambiguous form of global technocapitalism (Kellner, 1989).

Technocapitalism involves the emergence of a stage of capitalism in which technology is incorporated in its global infrastructure, producing novel forms of economy, society, technopolitics, and technoculture in what Castells (1997) calls a networked society. Hence, while there are novelties and discontinuities in the current configuration of economic, political, social, and cultural constellations that constitute the contemporary moment, there are also continuities with the previous forms of 'modern' society. In particular, the 'new' economy exhibits crucial features of the 'old' capitalism such as the driving forces of capital accumulation, competition, commodification, exploitation, and the business cycle. From this perspective, globalization and technological revolution are best theorized as forms of the global restructuring of capitalism in which technological development and a turbulent socio-economic transformation are intrinsically interconnected.

One of the novelties of the contemporary era is that much significant political struggle today is mediated by *technopolitics* (Kellner, 1997; Best & Kellner, 2001; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). The use of computer and information technology is becoming a normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media were some decades ago. Deploying computer-mediated technology for technopolitics, however, opens challenging terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increases potential for resistance and intervention by oppositional groups. Hence, if radical democracy is to have a future in the contemporary era it must incorporate technopolitics as part of its strategy, conceiving of technopolitics, however, as an arm of struggle and not an end in itself.

There are many competing concepts of radical democracy and we connect our version with the strong and participatory democracy stressed by Rousseau, Marx, Dewey, and the 1962 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) manifesto (online at http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111huron.html). This conception of radical democracy includes a Deweyean development of citizenship for social reconstruction and justice that is fostered through experimental engagement with technologies, ongoing debate and dialogue, and a multicultural pluralism that includes a wide range of voices representing significant social groups – including those to which citizenship has often been denied. Our notion of radical democracy thus builds on liberal notions that valorize the

separation of powers and a system of checks and balances in a democratic republic. Yet we also affirm a radical democratic transformation of actually existing liberal democracy through its emphasis on the mobilization of widespread participation, the empowerment of social movements, the production of alternative public spheres and oppositional subcultures, and the centrality of the rights and responsibilities of politically active citizens. Our views of radical democracy include as well ecological vistas that integrate understanding social and environmental concerns together, as well as the interrelationship between regional and planetary emplacement, and commitments to environmental protection, reclamation, and living in harmony with the earth and other living creatures.

In this chapter, we suggest some of the ways that emergent technologies are expanding democratic participation and are used to oppose dominant societal powers and institutions and to advance more radically democratic and socially just politics. Consequently, our focus is on the ways that an oppositional politics can use emergent technologies to promote democratic and anti-capitalist social movements aiming at radical structural transformation. It appears that globalization and technological revolution are in some ways inevitable – barring an apocalyptic collapse of the global economy – but the forms that they take are not. That is, the trends toward a more global economy and culture, a networked society, and the continued flow of commodities, images, cultural forms, technology, and people across the globe will continue apace, as will intense technological development. Both take the form of what Schumpeter called 'creative destruction' and guarantee that the next decades will be highly turbulent, contested, and full of struggle and conflict. But the forms that globalization and technological evolution will take are neither fixed nor determined. Hence, it is perfectly reasonable to oppose corporate capitalist globalization and its market model of society, its neoliberal laissez-faire ideology, and its putting profit, competition, and market logic before all other aspects of life, and to argue for radical democratic transformation and ecological reclamation. We will accordingly focus on the ways that technopolitics can and are being used for radical democracy and anti-capitalist contestation, while noting the limitations of this conception.

Technopolitics and oppositional political movements

Significant political struggles today against globalization are mediated by technopolitics, that is the use of emergent technologies such as

computers and the Internet to advance political goals. To some extent, politics in the modern era have always been mediated by technology, with the printing press, photography, film, and radio and television playing crucial roles in politics and all realms of social life, as McLuhan, Innis, Mumford, and others have long argued and documented. Participation in representative democracies is mediated by technology, as the disastrous failure of voting machines and the voting-counting process in the US 2000 and 2004 presidential elections dramatized (see Kellner, 2001, 2005; Miller, 2005; Fitrakis, Wasserman, & Rosenfeld, 2005).

What is novel about information and communication technology-mediated politics is that information can be instantly communicated to large numbers of individuals throughout the world who are connected via computer networks. The Internet is also potentially interactive, allowing discussion, debate, and online and archived discussion. Computer networks are increasingly multimedia in scope, allowing the dissemination of images, sounds, video, and other cultural forms. Moreover, the use of computer technology and networks is becoming a normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media were some decades ago. The use of computer-mediated technology for technopolitics, however, opens new possibilities of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media, and thus increases potential for intervention by oppositional groups, potentially expanding the scope of democratization.

Given the extent to which capital and its logic of commodification have colonized ever more areas of everyday life in recent years, it is somewhat astonishing that cyberspace is by and large decommodified for large numbers of people – at least in the overdeveloped Western liberal democracies. On the other hand, using computers, transforming information into data packets that can be sent through networks, and hooking oneself up to computer networks involves a form of commodified activity, inserting the user in networks and technology that are at the forefront of the construction of the so-called information society and global restructuring of capital. Thus the Internet is highly ambiguous from the perspective of commodification, as from other perspectives.

Nonetheless, in many areas of the globe, government and educational institutions, and some businesses, provide free Internet access and in some cases free computers, or at least workplace access. With flat-rate monthly phone bills (which do not exist, however, in much of the world), one can have access to a cornucopia of information and

entertainment on the Internet for free, or at low cost, one of the few decommodified spaces in the ultracommodified world of technocapitalism. So far, the 'information superhighway' is a freeway, although powerful interests would like to make it a toll-road. Indeed, corporate groups are converting it into a giant mall, thus commercializing the Internet and transforming it into a megaconsumer spectacle (see Schiller, 1999; Fabos, 2004).

Obviously, much of the world does not even have telephone service, much less computers, or high-speed Internet connections, and there are vast discrepancies in terms of who has access to computers and who participates in the technological revolution and cyberdemocracy today. As a result, there have been passionate debates over the extent and nature of the 'digital divide' between the information haves and have-nots. Critics of new technologies and cyberspace repeat incessantly that it is by and large young, white, middle- or upper-class males who are the dominant players in the cyberspaces of the present. While this is partly true, statistics and surveys indicate that many more women, people of color, seniors, and individuals from marginalized groups are becoming increasingly active.[3] In addition, computers may become part of the standard household consumer package in the overdeveloped world, although studies are emerging that indicate that many individuals claim that they have no intention of purchasing computers and using the Internet. Yet in the light of the importance of computers for work, social life, entertainment, and education, no doubt growing amounts of people will continue to go online. Further, there are plans afoot to wire the entire world with satellites that would make the Internet and new communication technologies accessible to people who do not now even have a telephone, TV or even electricity, and wireless, interactive technologies are touted as the next stage of networked communication (see James, 2001; Rheingold, 2002).

However widespread and common computers and emergent technologies become, it is clear that they are of essential importance already for work, politics, education, and social life, and that people who want to participate in the public and cultural life of the future will need to have computer access and literacy. Although there is a real threat that the computerization of society will intensify the current inequalities in relations of class, race, and gender power, there is also the possibility that a democratized and computerized public sphere might provide opportunities to overcome these injustices. Cyberdemocracy and the Internet should be seen therefore as a contested terrain. Radical democratic activists should look to its possibilities for resistance and the

advancement of political education, action, and organization, while engaging in struggles over the digital divide. Dominant corporate and state powers, as well as conservative and rightist groups, have been making sustained use of ICTs to advance their agendas. If forces struggling for democratization and social justice want to become players in the cultural and political battles of the future, they must devise ways to use technopolitics to advance a radical democratic and ecological agenda and the interests of the oppressed.

There are by now copious examples of how the Internet and cyberdemocracy have been used within oppositional political movements (see Note 2). A large number of insurgent intellectuals and activists are already making use of ICTs and public spheres in their political projects. The peasants and guerilla armies who formed the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, beginning in January 1994 used computer databases, guerrilla radio, and other forms of media to circulate their ideas and to promote their cause. Every manifesto, text, and bulletin produced by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, who occupied land in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, was immediately circulated through the world via computer networks.[4]

In an earlier era, seeing the progressive potential of advanced communication technologies in revolutionary struggle, Frantz Fanon (1965) described the central role of the radio in the Algerian revolution, and Lenin stressed the importance of film in spreading communist ideology after the Bolshevik revolution. Audiotapes were used to advance the insurrection in Iran and to disseminate alternative information by political movements throughout the world (see Downing, 2000). The Tiananmen Square democracy movement in China and various groups struggling against the remnants of Stalinism in the former communist bloc used computer bulletin boards and networks, as well as a variety of forms of communications, to promote their movements.

Further, as we shall see below, the anti-corporate globalization movement has made impressive use of technopolitics. Thus, using ICTs to link information and practice and to advance oppositional politics is neither extraneous to political battles nor merely utopian. Even if immediate gains are not won, often the information circulated or the alliances formed can have material effects. There are, moreover, striking examples of how Internet-centered organizing campaigns effectively worked against the institutions and corporations of capitalist globalization. There have been many campaigns against the excesses of capitalist global corporations such as Nike and McDonald's. Hackers attacked Nike's site in June 2000 and substituted a 'global justice' message for Nike's corporate

hype. Many anti-Nike websites and listserves have emerged, helping groups struggling against Nike's labor practices to circulate information and organize movements against Nike, which have forced them to modify their labor practices.[5]

A British group that created an anti-McDonald's website against the junk food corporation and then distributed the information through digital and print media has received significant attention. This site was developed by supporters of two British activists, Helen Steel and Dave Morris, who were sued by McDonald's for distributing leaflets denouncing the corporation's low wages, advertising practices, involvement in deforestation, cruel treatment of animals, and patronage of an unhealthy diet. The activists counterattacked and with help from supporters, organized a McLibel campaign, assembled a McSpotlight website with a tremendous amount of information criticizing the corporation, and mobilized experts to testify and confirm their criticisms. The three-year civil trial, Britain's longest ever, ended ambiguously on June 19, 1997, with the Judge defending some of McDonald's claims against the activists, while substantiating some of the activists' criticisms (Vidal, 1997, pp. 299–315).

Anti-Nike and anti-McDonald's websites and others critical of global capitalist corporations have disseminated a tremendous amount of information. Many labor organizations are also beginning to make use of the new technologies. The Clean Clothes Campaign, a movement started by Dutch women in 1990 in support of Filipino garment workers, has supported strikes throughout the world, exposing exploitative working conditions (see www.cleanclothes.org/1/index.html). In 1997, activists involved in Korean workers strikes and the Merseyside dock strike in England used websites to promote international solidarity (for the latter see www.gn.apc.org/labournet/docks/). Jesse Drew (1998) has extensively interviewed representatives of major US labor organizations to see how they were making use of new communication technologies and how these instruments helped them with their struggles; many of his union activists indicated how useful e-mail, faxes, websites, and the Internet have been to their struggles and, in particular, indicated how such technopolitics helped organize demonstrations or strikes in favor of striking English or Australian dockworkers, as when US longshoremen organized strikes to boycott ships carrying material loaded by scab workers. Technopolitics thus helps labor create global alliances in order to combat increasingly transnational corporations.[6]

On the whole, labor organizations, such as the North South Dignity of Labor group, note that computer networks are useful for organizing

and distributing information, but cannot replace print media, which are more accessible to many of its members; face-to-face meetings; and traditional forms of political action. Thus, the challenge is to articulate one's communications politics with actual movements and struggles so that cyberpolitics is an arm of real battles and nourishes genuine radical democracy rather than their replacement or substitute. The most efficacious Internet projects have indeed intersected with activist movements encompassing campaigns to free political prisoners, boycotts of corporate products, and various labor and even revolutionary struggles, as noted above.

The global movement against capitalist globalization

One of the more instructive examples of the use of the Internet to foster global struggles against the excesses of corporate capitalism occurred in the protests in Seattle and throughout the world against the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in December 1999, and the subsequent emergence of a worldwide anti-globalization movement in 2000–2001. Behind these actions was a global protest movement using the Internet to organize resistance to the institutions of capitalist globalization, while championing democratization. In the build up to the 1999 Seattle demonstrations, many websites generated anti-WTO material and numerous mailing lists used the Internet to distribute critical material and to organize the protest. The result was the mobilization of caravans from throughout the United States to take protestors to Seattle, as well as contingents of activists throughout the world. Many of the protestors had never met and were recruited through the Internet. For the first time ever, labor, environmentalist, feminist, anti-capitalist, animal rights, anarchist, and other groups organized to protest aspects of globalization and to form new alliances and solidarities for future struggles. In addition, demonstrations took place throughout the world, and a proliferation of anti-WTO material against the extremely secret group spread throughout the Internet (see Cockburn, St. Clair, & Sekula, 2000).

Furthermore, the Internet provided critical coverage of the event, documentation of the various groups' protests, and debate over the WTO and globalization. Whereas the mainstream media presented the protests as 'anti-trade', featured the incidents of anarchist violence against property, and minimized police brutality against demonstrators, the Internet provided pictures, eyewitness accounts, and reports of police viciousness and the generally peaceful and nonviolent nature of the protests. While the mainstream media framed the Seattle anti-WTO

activities negatively and privileged suspect spokespeople like Patrick Buchanan as critics of globalization, the Internet provided multiple representations of the demonstrations, advanced reflective discussion of the WTO and globalization, and presented a diversity of critical perspectives.

The Seattle protests had some immediate consequences. Their issues were discussed by the media, and elite meetings like the WTO were forced to engage the problems raised. More important, many activists were energized by the new alliances, solidarities, and militancy, and continued to cultivate an anti-corporate globalization movement. The Seattle demonstrations were followed by April 2000 struggles in Washington, DC, to protest against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and later in the year against capitalist globalization in Prague and Melbourne; in April 2001, an extremely large and militant protest erupted against the Free Trade Area of the Americas summit in Quebec City and in summer 2001 a sizeable demonstration took place in Genoa.

In May 2002, a surprisingly big demonstration took place in Washington against capitalist globalization and for peace and justice, and it was apparent that a new worldwide movement was in the making that was uniting diverse opponents of capitalist globalization throughout the world. The anti-corporate globalization movement favored globalization-from-below, which would protect the environment, labor rights, national cultures, democratization, and other goods from the ravages of an uncontrolled capitalist globalization (see Falk, 1999; and Brecher, Costello, & Smith, 2000). The movement against capitalist globalization used the Internet to organize mass demonstrations and to disseminate information to the world concerning the policies of the institutions of capitalist globalization. The events made clear that the protestors were not against globalization per se, but were against neoliberal globalization, opposing specific policies and institutions that produce intensified exploitation of labor, environmental devastation, growing divisions among the social classes, and the undermining of democracy. The emerging anti-globalization-from-above movements are locating these problems in the context of opposition to a restructuring of a neoliberal market capitalism on a worldwide basis for maximum profit with zero accountability. The anti-capitalist movements, by contrast, have made clear the need for democratization, regulation, rules, and globalization in the interests of people and not profit.

The new movements against globalization-from-above have thus placed the issues of global justice, democracy, and environmental issues

squarely in the center of important political concerns of our time. Hence, whereas the mainstream media had failed to vigorously debate or even to report on globalization until the recent past, and rarely, if ever, critically discussed the activities of the WTO, World Bank, and IMF, there is now a widely circulating critical discourse and controversy regarding these institutions. Stung by criticisms, representatives of the World Bank, in particular, are pledging reform. Pressures are mounting concerning proper and improper roles for the major global institutions, highlighting their limitations and deficiencies, and the need for reforms like debt relief for overburdened developing countries to solve some of their fiscal and social problems.

Computer-mediated activism is thus emerging that is qualitatively different from the party-based Socialist and Communist Internationals. Such networking links labor, feminist, ecological, peace, and other anti-capitalist groups, providing the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics (see Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Best & Kellner, 2001; Burbach, 2001).

Blogs, wikis, and social networking: Toward alternative and participatory global/local interventions

Emergent interactive forms of technopolitics, such as blogs and wikis, have become widely popular Internet tools alongside e-mail, listserves, and websites. The mushrooming community that has erupted around blogging is particularly deserving of analysis here, as bloggers have repeatedly demonstrated themselves as technoactivists favoring not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic sociopolitical intervention, providing new tools for radical democracy.

Blogs, short for web logs', are partly successful because they are relatively easy to create and maintain even for nontechnical web users. Combining the hypertext of webpages, the multi-user discussion of messageboards and listserves, and the mass syndication ability of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and Atom platforms (as well as e-mail), blogs are popular because they represent the next evolution of a web-based experience that is connecting a range of new media. If the World Wide Web managed to form a global network of interlocking, informative websites, blogs make the idea of a dynamic network of ongoing debate, dialogue, and commentary come alive both online and offline and so emphasize a radical democratic politics and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree.

Political bloggers have played a significant role in several recent media spectacles in US politics, beginning in 2003 with the focus of attention upon the racist remarks made by Speaker of the House Trent Lott and then the creation of a media uproar over the dishonest reporting exposed at the *New York Times*, concerning claims over alleged Iraqi "Weapons of Mass Destruction" and stories fabricated by a young reporter Jayson Blair. Lott's remarks had been buried in the back of the *Washington Post* until communities of bloggers began publicizing them, generating public and media interest that then led to his removal. In the *NYT* example, bloggers again rabidly set upon the newsprint giant, whipping up so much controversy and hostile journalistic opinion that the *Times*'s executive and managing editors were forced to resign in disgrace. Likewise, CBS News and its anchor, Dan Rather, were targeted for disgrace when right-wing bloggers attacked and debunked a September 2004 report by Rather on *60 Minutes* that purported to reveal documents suggesting that the young George W. Bush disobeyed an order in failing to report for a physical examination during his early 1970s National Guard service and that Bush family friends helped him get out of military service in the Vietnam era and enabled him to not complete his National Guard duty (Kellner, 2005).

Taking note of blogs' ability to organize and proliferate groups around issues, the campaign for Howard Dean became an early blog adopter (www.blogforamerica.com) and his blog helped to successfully catalyze his grassroots campaign. In turn, blogs became *de rigueur* for all political candidates and have been sites for discussing the policies and platforms of various candidates, interfacing with local and national support offices, and in some cases speaking directly to the presidential hopefuls themselves, leading to predictions that the Internet will henceforth play a central role in future US political campaigns.[7]

Another momentous media spectacle, fueled by intense blog discussion, emerged in May 2004 with the television and Internet circulation of a panorama of images of US prisoner abuse of Iraqis and the quest to pin responsibility on the soldiers and higher US military and political authorities. Evoking universal disgust and repugnance, the images of young American soldiers humiliating Iraqis circulated with satellite-driven speed through broadcasting channels and print media, but it was the manner in which they were proliferated and archived on the Internet that may make them stand as some of the most influential images of all time. Thanks in part to blogs and the Internet this scandal may persist in a way that much mainstream media spectacle often does not, and the episode suggests that blogs made an important intervention into Bush's and future US military policy and may play an important role in future US politics.

Bloggers should not be judged, however, simply by their ability to generate political and media spectacle. As alluded to earlier, bloggers are cumulatively expanding the notion of what the Internet, cyberculture, and radical democracy are and how they can be used. In the process they are questioning, and helping to redefine, conventional journalism, its frames, and limitations. Thus, a genre of 'Watchblogs' (www.watchblog.com) has emerged that focuses upon specific news media, or even reporters, dissecting their every inflection, uncovering their spin, and attacking their errors. Many believe that a young and inexperienced White House mainstream corporate media press corps was overly hypercritical of Al Gore in the 2000 election, while basically giving George W. Bush a pass (Kellner, 2001); since the 2004 election, however, the major corporate media political correspondents have been minutely dissected for their biases, omissions, and slants.

One astonishing case brought by the watchblogging community was that the Bush administration provided press credentials to a fake journalist who worked for a certain Talon News service that was a front for conservative propaganda. The Bush White House issued a press pass to avowed conservative partisan 'Jeff Gannon' who was a regular in the White House briefing room, where he was frequently called upon by Bush administration press secretary Scott McClellan whenever the questions from the press corps got too hot for comfort. After he manufactured quotes by Democratic Party Senators Clinton and Reid in White House press conferences, bloggers found out that Gannon's real name was 'James Guckert' and that he also ran gay porn sites and worked as a gay escort. As another example of the collapse of the investigative functions of the mainstream media, although 'Gannon' was a frequent presence lobbing softball questions in the White House briefing room, his press colleagues never questioned his credentials, leaving investigative reporting to bloggers that the mainstream media was apparently too lazy and incompetent to do themselves (Kellner, 2005).

One result of the 2004 election and subsequent US politics has been the decentering and marginalizing of the importance of the corporate media punditocracy by Internet and blogosphere sources. A number of websites and blogs have been dedicated to deconstructing mainstream corporate journalism, taking apart everyone from the right-wing spinners on Fox to reporters for the *New York Times*. An ever-proliferating number of websites have been attacking mainstream pundits, media institutions, and misreporting; with the possible exception of the *New York Times*'s Paul Krugman, Internet and blog sources were often much more interesting, insightful, and perhaps even influential than the

overpaid, underinformed, and often incompetent mainstream corporate media figures. For example, every day the incomparable Bob Somerby on dailyhowler.com, savages mainstream media figures, disclosing their ignorance, bias, and incompetence while a wide range of other websites and blogs contain media critique and alternative information and views (see, for example, http://mediamatters.org/).

As a response there have been fierce critiques of the blogosphere by mainstream media pundits and sources, although many in the corporate mainstream are developing blogs, appropriating the genre for themselves. Yet, mainstream corporate media, and especially television, continue to exert major political influence, and constant critique of corporate media should be linked with efforts at reform and developing alternatives, as activists continue to create ever better critical and oppositional media linked to ever-expanding progressive movements. For without adequate information, intelligent debate, criticism of the established institutions and parties, and meaningful alternatives, democracy is but an ideological phantom, without life or substance.

Democracy requires action, even the activity of computer terminals. However, part of the excitement of blogs is that it has liberated producers/designers from their desktops. Far from writing in virtual alienation from the world, today's bloggers are posting pictures, text, audio, and video on the fly from personal digital assistant (PDA) devices and cell phones as part of a movement of mobloggers (that is, mobile bloggers; see www.mobloggers.com). Large political events, such as the World Summit for Sustainable Development, the World Social Forum, and the G8 forums all now have wireless bloggers providing real time alternative coverage and a new genre of confblogs (that is, conference blogs) has emerged as a result. One environmental activist, a tree-sitter named Remedy, even broadcast a wireless account of her battle against the Pacific Lumber Company from her blog (www.contrast.org/treesit), 130 feet atop an old growth redwood. She has since been forcefully removed but continues blogging in defense of a sustainable world in which new technologies can coexist with wilderness and other species.

In fact, there are increasingly all manner of blogging communities. Milbloggers (that is, military bloggers) provide detailed commentary on the action of US and other troops throughout the world, sometimes providing critical commentary that eludes mainstream media. And in a more cultural turn blog-types are emerging that are less textual, supported by audio bloggers, video bloggers, and photo bloggers, with the three often meshing as an on-the-fly multimedia experience. Blogging has also become important within education circles (www.ebn.weblogger.com)

and people are forming university blogging networks (blogs.law.harvard.edu) just as they previously created city-wide blogging portals (www.nycbloggers.com).

While the overt participatory politics of bloggers, as well as their sheer numbers, makes the exciting emergent media tool called the wiki secondary to this discussion, the inherent participatory, collective, and democratic design of wikis have many people believing that they represent the coming evolution of the hypertextual web. Taken from the Hawaiian word for 'quick', wikis are popular innovative forms of group databases and hypertextual archives that work on the principle of open editing, meaning that any online user can not only change the content of the database (add, edit, or delete), but also its organization (the way in which material links together and networks). Wikis have been coded such that they come with a built-in fail-safe that automatically saves and logs each previous version of the archive. This makes them highly flexible because users are then free to transform the archive as they see fit, as no version of the previous information is ever lost beyond recall. The result, then, is not only of an information-rich databank, but one that can be examined as *in process*, with viewers able to trace and investigate how the archive has grown over time, which users have made changes, and what exactly they have contributed.

Although initially conceived as a simple, informal, and free-form alternative to more highly structured and complex groupware products such as IBM's Lotus Notes, wikis can be used for a variety of purposes beyond organizational planning (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). To the degree that wikis could easily come to supplant the basic model of the website, which is designed privately, placed online, and then is mostly a static experience beyond following preprogrammed links, wikis deserve investigation by technology theorists as the next wave in the emerging democratic web-based media.

One interesting wiki project is the dKosopedia (www.dkosopedia.com), which is providing a valuable cultural resource and learning environment through its synthesis and analysis of the connections behind today's political happenings. Perhaps the pre-eminent example of wiki power, though, is the impressive Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), a free, globally collaborative encyclopedia project based on wiki protocol that would have made Diderot and his fellow *philosophes* proud. Beginning on January 15, 2001, the Wikipedia has quickly grown to include approximately 1,000,000 always-evolving articles in English (with nearly 4,000,000 in more than 100 languages total) and the database grows with each passing day. With over 13,000 vigilant contributors worldwide creating, updating, and deleting information in the archive daily, the

charge against wikis is that such unmoderated and asynchronous archives must descend into informative chaos. However, as required by the growth of the project, so-called Wikipedians have gathered together and developed their own loose norms regarding what constitutes helpful and contributive actions on the site. Disagreements, which do occur, are settled online by Wikipedians in what resembles a form of virtualized Athenian democracy wherein all contributors have a voice, vote, and opportunity for intervention.

Blogs like Corante's Many2Many (www.corante.com/many) track how blogs and wikis are pointing toward a greater trend in emergent media development toward 'social software' that networks people around similar interests and other semantic connections. As alluded earlier, Howard Dean's campaign use of web-facilitated 'meet ups' generated novel forms for grassroots electoral politics enthusiasm, but notably people are using online social networking to gather around all manner of topics and issues (www.meetup.com). More recently, social software has moved to incorporate a quasi 'six degrees of separation' model into its mix, with portals like MySpace (www.myspace.com), Friendster (www.friendster.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), Ryze (www.ryze.com), Orkut (www.orkut.com), and FriendFan (www.friendfan.com) allowing groups to form around common interests, while also creating linkages and testimonials between friends and family members. This has allowed for a greater amount of trust in actually allowing virtual relationships to flourish offline, while also allowing a new friendship to quickly expand into the pre-existing communities of interest and caring that each user brings to the site. The dramatic escalation of YouTube (www.youtube.com/) in 2006 allowed circulation of both home and creative videos, as well as videos of unsuspecting politicians and celebrities in their unguarded and often embarrassing moments.

Yet, on the negative side, these spaces are often sites of unbridled narcissism, self-promotion, and have become targets for Internet sexual predators.

While all of these examples are reason to hope that the emergent media ecology can be tools for the strengthening of community and democracy amongst its users, it must be stressed again that we do not conclude that either blogs or wikis or social networking software, alone or altogether, are congruent with strong democratic practices and emancipatory anti-capitalist politics. For all the interesting developments we are chronicling here, there are also the shopping blogs, behind-the-firewall corporate wikis, and all-in-one business platforms such as Microsoft's planned Wallop application. It remains a problem that most blogs, while providing

the possibility for public voice for most citizens, are unable to be found by most users thus resulting in so-called nanoaudiences. Further, that a great many of the millions of blogs have an extremely high turnover rate, falling into silence as quickly as they rise into voice, and that huge amounts of users remain captivated by the individualistic diary form of the 'daily me' means that the logic of capitalism is here too apparent.

Technopolitics: A contested terrain

A key to developing a robust radical democratic technopolitics is *articulation*, the mediation of technopolitics with real problems and struggles, rather than self-contained reflections on the internal politics of the Internet. The examples in this study suggest how technopolitics make possible a refiguring of politics, a refocusing of politics on everyday life, oppositional social movements, and ways of using the tools and techniques of emergent computer and communication technology to expand the field and domain of politics. In this conjuncture, the ideas of Guy Debord and the Situationist International are especially relevant with their stress on the construction of situations, the use of technology, media of communication, and cultural forms to promote a revolution of everyday life, and to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment.[8] To some extent, the new technologies are revolutionary and constitute a revolution of everyday life, but it is often a process that promotes and disseminates the capitalist consumer society and involves expanding modes of fetishism, enslavement, and domination, yet to be clearly perceived and theorized.

Clearly, right-wing and reactionary forces can and have used the Internet to promote their political agendas as well. In a short time, one can easily access an exotic witch's brew of websites maintained by the Ku Klux Klan, myriad neo-Nazi assemblages, including the Aryan Nation and various militia groups. Internet discussion lists also disperse these views and right-wing extremists are aggressively active on many computer forums, as well as radio programs and stations, public access television programs, fax campaigns, video and even rock music productions. These organizations are hardly harmless, having carried out terrorism of various sorts extending from church burnings to the bombings of public buildings. Adopting quasi-Leninist discourse and tactics for ultraright causes, these groups have been successful in recruiting working-class members devastated by the developments of global capitalism, which has resulted in widespread unemployment for traditional

forms of industrial, agricultural, and unskilled labor. Moreover, extremist websites have influenced alienated middle-class youth as well. A 1999 HBO documentary 'Hate on the Internet' provides a disturbing number of examples of how right-wing extremist websites influenced disaffected youth to commit hate crimes, and extremist Islamicists have regularly used the Internet to promote anger and violent Jihad (Jordan, Torres, & Horsburgh, 2005). In fact, as websites like www.alneda.com attest, a particularly disturbing twist in the saga of technopolitics seems to be that global 'terrorist' groups are now increasingly using the Internet and websites to document, promote and coordinate their causes (Kellner, 2003).

Different political groups are engaging in cyberwar as adjuncts of their political battles. Israeli hackers have repeatedly attacked the websites of Hezbollah, while pro-Palestine hackers have reportedly placed militant demands and slogans on the websites of Israel's army, foreign ministry, and parliament. Likewise, Pakistani and Indian computer hackers have waged similar cyberbattles against opposing forces websites in the bloody struggle over Kashmir, while rebel forces in the Philippines taunt government troops with cell-phone calls and messages and attack government websites.

The Internet is thus a contested terrain, used by the left, right, and center to advance their own agendas and interests. The political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past conflicts, but all political struggle is now mediated by media, computer, and information technologies and increasingly will be so. Those interested in the politics and culture of the future should therefore be clear on the important role of the new public spheres and intervene accordingly.

Active citizens need to acquire multiple forms of technological literacy to intervene in the ever-proliferating public spheres of the media and information society. In addition to traditional literacy skills centered upon reading, writing, and speaking, engaged citizens and public intellectuals need to learn to use the emergent technologies to engage the public and participate in democratic discussion and debate.[9] Computer and digital technologies thus expand the field and capacities of the intellectual as well as the possibilities for political intervention. During the Age of Big Media, critical-oppositional intellectuals were by and large marginalized, unable to gain access to the major sites of mass communication. With the decentralization of the Internet, however, challenging possibilities for public intellectuals exist to reach broad audiences.

It is therefore the responsibility of the active citizen to creatively engage these technologies, as well as to critically analyze the diverse developments of the cyberculture. This requires dialectical thinking that discriminates between the benefits and the costs, the upsides and downsides, of emergent technologies and devising ways that they can be used to promote positive values like education, democracy, enlightenment, and ecology. Active citizens thus face novel challenges, and the future of democracy depends in part on whether emergent technologies will be used for domination or democratization, and whether each individual will sit on the sidelines or participate in the development of oppositional democratic public spheres. The future of radical democracy is dependent on making use of the technologies and possibilities for struggle and democratic participation in the present age and the articulation of technopolitics with progressive social movements.

Notes

1. This study and the concepts of globalization and technology developed here are grounded in the studies of Best & Kellner (2001), Kellner (2002), and Kahn & Kellner (2005).
2. See, for example, Castells (1997), Hill & Hughes (1998), Dyer-Witheford (1999), Best & Kellner (2001), Hardt & Negri (2000, 2004), Strangelove (2005), and Chadwick (2006).
3. The 'digital divide' has emerged as the buzzword for perceived divisions between information technology have and have-nots in the current economy and society. For analysis of reports and statistics on the divide, see Chadwick (2006). It is clear that there is a gaping division between information technology haves and have-nots, that this is a major challenge to developing an egalitarian and democratic society, and an important issue for the technopolitics of radical democracy.
4. On the Zapatistas, see the documents collected in Zapatistas (1994) and Chadwick (2006).
5. For a dossier of material assembled on Nike's labor practices and campaigns against them, see the material at cbae.mnsu.edu/~davidboje/nike/nikemain.html.
6. For an overview of the use of electronic communication technology by labor, see the studies by Brecher & Costello (1994), Dyer-Witheford (1999), and Drew (1998).
7. See Adam Nagourney (2006), 'Internet Injects Sweeping Change Into US Politics', *New York Times*, April 2.
8. On the importance of the ideas of Debord and the Situationist International to make sense of the present conjuncture see Best & Kellner (1997), Chapter 3, and on the new forms of the interactive consumer society, see Best & Kellner (2001).
9. For discussion of multiple literacies and reconstruction of education needed to effectively use the new technologies for education, communication, and democratization, see Kellner (2004).

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3

Radical Citizenship in the Republic of Technology: A Sketch

Darin Barney

> There's only one way of life, and that's your, your own, your own.
>
> The Levellers, 'One Way' (1991)

Introduction

Near the end of his famous essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', Martin Heidegger (1977, p. 32) concludes that the only way to recover agency with respect to the enframing essence of modern technology and its associated modes of being – modes of being characterized by calculation, instrumental reason, rootlessness and the will to master human and non-human nature – is to manage somehow to 'catch sight of what comes to presence in technology, instead of merely gaping at the technological'. Of the several possible meanings of this phrase, one seems the clearest: he meant that instead of marveling or fretting over the possibilities of particular instruments, we should approach them as instances in which the truth about what it means to live in technological society is presenced or revealed. This was the so-called saving power that Heidegger thought technology harbored within itself. Every technological instrument or system unconceals the very essence of technology itself and, if we can catch sight of that, it becomes possible to establish a relationship with technology in which we do not cede to it the ground of independent moral and political judgment upon which stands human agency and citizenship. If, however, we approach discrete technologies *simply* as instruments, either to be used or even to be mastered, we give ourselves over to the enframing essence of technology, to being enframed as technological beings. And we forego the opportunity that technologies – especially

new technologies – provide for a radical engagement with how we actually live in technological society, and the possibilities of living differently. As Heidegger (1977, p. 32) puts it: 'So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology.'

Paragraphs such as the preceding one can get a person barred from most of the polite clubs in which the politics of technology are currently raised for discussion. To speak of the essence of anything, let alone of something as contingent as the meaning and application of technology, is to speak a dead language. And to summon the voice of Heidegger on technology is to confirm the very darkest of suspicions. These prejudices aside, there is a thought here worth thinking: the Internet is not merely another technological instrument to be used or controlled by citizens – though, as I will suggest below, these possibilities cannot be discounted either. It is also, and perhaps moreover, the latest manifestation of a particular way of taking up with the world that goes by the name of technology. In this view, asking after the prospects for radical democracy on or through the Internet, as if the latter were merely a tool, begs the question and contributes to a condition in which the possibility hoped for (namely, radical citizenship) is rendered even more remote. As Mark Poster (2001, pp. 176–77) has perceptively written: 'the Internet is more like a social space than a thing, so that its effects are more like Germany than those of hammers: the effect of Germany upon the people within is to make them Germans; the effect of hammers is not to make people hammers. . . . As long as we understand the Internet as a hammer we fail to discern the way it is like Germany.' However, it is not only because of its spatial characteristics that the Internet *makes* people what they are, as opposed to merely being *used* by them. It is also because the Internet is but one particularly brilliant technology in a vast constellation of technological devices, systems and habits that together comprise the modern Western way of knowing and acting, of being in the world. The prospects for radical democracy in relation to the Internet are thus contained within the broader horizon of the question of radical citizenship in relation to technology more generally. And it is a question not only of what we do with this particular technology, but also of what technology more generally makes of us. Citizenship, too, is a way of knowing and acting, a way of being in the world, a practice. The question is whether, and under what conditions, these two ways of being in the world, technology and citizenship, can co-exist.

Beyond membership

The answer to this question depends heavily on what is meant by citizenship. To say that citizenship is a practice is to say that it is something not merely borne but more precisely something done, not just an attribute but an act, not simply a possession inherited passively or won through due process or struggle but a habit motivated by circumstance and obligation, cultivated through education and experience, consistently performed. This way of thinking about citizenship derives from the republican tradition, and can be distinguished from the rights-based conceptions that prevail in most liberal democratic societies (Pocock, 1975; Skinner, 1978). For liberals, citizenship names a particular relationship between an individual and the state, and between the members of one national community and another. Citizenship here means the individual possession of rights against the state and corresponding obligations to it, and establishes national identities as against others in territorially-defined units. This conception animates contemporary concerns with liberal democracy's ability to accommodate the dynamics of diversity, multiculturalism, plurinationalism, migration, deterritorialization and globalization characteristic of the present era. Here, the key questions concern the principles upon which membership and its attendant rights are distributed, and the bases upon which people are formally included or excluded from the political community. Theories of social citizenship add to this an appreciation that citizenship has material, as well as formal and legal, requirements (Marshall, 1965). In this view, the effectiveness of things like membership, rights and freedoms rests not only on equality before and under the law but also upon relatively equal access to the social and material resources that allow people to act on these entitlements.

In this line of thinking, citizenship is about the formal qualifications, obligations and benefits of political membership, and the conditions of their just distribution. There are potentially many interesting and critical questions about the relationship between citizenship and technology that could be raised from this perspective, but most of them reside firmly within the horizon established by liberalism itself, and do not open onto more radical terrain. Most of these questions also implicitly confirm the technological dispensation, rather than exposing it to interrogation.[1] Such openings might be provided by an account of citizenship that is not confined to questions about the conditions or extent of *membership* in a liberal polity (*who gets in?*), or to questions about the

distribution of material resources needed to make such membership practicable (*who gets what?*), but extends to questions about the quality of citizenship as a practice (*what do people do*?).

Citizenship as political judgment

The practice of citizenship is, at its core, the practice of political judgment. To be a citizen is to bear the rights and obligations attached to membership in a given political community; to be *as* a citizen is to engage in judgment about common things in relation to and with others. This conception of citizenship as engagement in political judgment originates in Aristotle, and works its way through the republican traditions of Machiavelli and Arendt and the democratic traditions of Rousseau and Habermas (to name but a handful of representative figures). In his comprehensive meditation on the substance of political judgment, Ronald Beiner (1983, p. 8) observes that 'judgment is a natural capacity of human beings that can, potentially, be shared by all'. Aside from its essentially and radically democratic character, political judgment demarcates the boundary of the practice of citizenship quite expansively, while naming the characteristic activity within this boundary quite precisely. As Beiner (1983, p. 8) writes:

> In every contact we have with the political world we are engaged in judgment. Judging is what we do when we read politics in our morning newspaper, when we discuss politics during family or friendly conversation, and when we watch politics on television. Judging is also what we as academics do when we try to keep abreast of the political developments in our world, or when we strive to appraise the course of modern political history. And, finally, judging is what we are doing also when we *do* politics, that is, when we act in a public setting or assume public responsibilities for which we are held accountable. The normal kind of contact that each of us – academics, political observers, and common citizens – has with politics is the opportunity to judge.

If it is allowed that 'common citizens' stands for the great breadth and diversity of subject positions present in contemporary political communities, the scope of political judgment as the characteristic practice of citizenship broadens significantly.

There is a great deal to consider in a conception of citizenship that posits political judgment as its practical core, and a thoroughgoing defense would entail more than is possible in this brief sketch.[2] There

are, however, two considerations that bear elaboration in the present context: the modes of political judgment and the scope of its application.

As suggested above, the primary avenues along which citizenship as the practice of political judgment has traveled into the modern political imagination are republicanism and democracy. In the republican tradition, citizenship consists in 'active participation in a dialogue that weighs the substantive merit of competing conceptions of the good and that aims at transforming social arrangements in the direction of what is judged, in this active public dialogue, as the best possible (individual and collective) good' (Beiner, 1992, p. 104). Of particular importance here is the specification of dialogue as the privileged mode of engagement in political judgment. In Beiner's account, dialogic speech is central not only to republicanism, but to any account of citizenship that places the practice of political judgment at its center. 'Political experience', Beiner (1983, p. xiv) writes, 'as a specific mode of being in the world, is constituted by speech, by the capacity of human beings to humanize their world through communication, discourse and talk about what is shared and thus available for intersubjective judgment'. Political judgment as the substantive core of citizenship becomes a critical concept to the extent that it draws attention to 'that which alone can qualify the political sphere of existence as authentically political, namely, speech' (Beiner, 1983, p. xvi). The sort of dialogue presented here as constitutive of the political is not simply the strategic assertion of interests in speech, but their formation, alongside that of the self- and other- understandings upon which these interests are based, through the medium of dialogic speech by which the interests and understandings of others can be publicly encountered. This identification of a particular sort of speech as the privileged mode of political judgment and citizenship connects the republican tradition to contemporary theories of communicative action, discourse ethics and deliberative democracy. According to Beiner (1983, p. 152), the thread running through the fabric of 'what Arendt and Habermas call a public realm or a public space, what Charles Taylor has called a deliberative culture, and what in the traditional vocabulary goes by the name of a republic', is an understanding that 'it is through rational dialogue, and especially through political dialogue, that we clarify, even to ourselves, who we are and what we want . . . it is through speech and deliberation that man finds the location of his proper humanity, between beast and god, in the life of the citizen.'

Modes of judgment

This is, perhaps, a step too far. The singularity of rational dialogue in this formulation suggests that it is not engagement in political judgment *per se* that constitutes citizenship but, rather, engagement in a particular mode of political judgment, namely, rational dialogue. When it is identified so strongly with reasoned speech – arguably one among several possible modes – political judgment as the definitive practice of citizenship is imbued with an exclusive character that risks narrowing its purchase as a critical category. It also belies the intuition that 'common citizens' are engaged in political judgment 'in *every* contact we have with the political world' (Beiner, 1983, p. 8. Emphasis added). As Engin Isin (2002, p. 3) points out, constitution of the category 'citizen' always simultaneously entails constitution of its other, a second, subaltern category marked by a lack or absence of the positive quality that defines the first. In this case, to define citizenship as engagement in political judgment *in the mode of rational dialogue* is to exclude and subordinate all those whose characteristic or preferred modes of engaging in political judgment do not conform to the (prevailing) norms of reasoned speech (Young, 1997). If rational dialogue (or, even more narrowly, rational argument) is either identical with political judgment, or the only mode of practicing the latter that merits the designation of citizenship, then those who engage with the political world in other modes are relegated to alterity as either beasts or gods (most often beasts), but definitely not citizens.

Broadly speaking, the identification of citizenship with rational dialogue is part of a long-standing project that seeks to distinguish politics from violence and irrationality, to replace coercion and prejudice with what Habermas (1993, p. 163) has called 'the unforced force of the better argument'. It inherits the ancient Greek distinction between a citizen, who had to be persuaded, and a slave or a wife, both of whom could be ordered around. A logocentric definition of citizenship rules out accepting violence as a mode of political action undertaken by citizens *qua* citizens. Historically, it has also provided ideological cover for the exclusion from citizenship and public life of entire classes of people deemed insufficiently rational, typically women, aliens or strangers, and the mass public. This may be too high a price to pay, even if we agree that rational dialogue or reasoned argument is the best mode of engagement in political judgment. Paying this price can be avoided, however, by retaining political judgment as the core of the practice of citizenship while relinquishing its exclusive identification with

reasoned speech narrowly defined. This requires acknowledgement of the multiplicity of modes in which citizens might make political judgments, and the contribution made to the struggle for justice by these modes of expression and the people who use them. Concretely: when the Madres de Plaza de Mayo marched silently and incessantly before the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, their heads covered with white handkerchiefs embroidered with the names of their disappeared children, they were engaged, resolutely and dramatically, in political judgment (Guzman Bouvard, 1994). It is not clear that public mourning comprises reasoned speech or dialogue, but it is undeniable that the Mothers were making a claim and practicing citizenship.[3] The same might be said of the hacktivists running the OpenNet Initiative (2006), who research, test and promote technologies designed to assist democratic activists seeking to circumvent censorship, surveillance and data filtration by authoritarian states. Writing code that makes it possible for a Chinese dissident to access unfiltered Google results surreptitiously might not be reasoned speech, but it surely is the act of a person making a political judgment, a person practicing citizenship.

Examples such as these suggest that a radical version of citizenship as political judgment will have to recognize the broadest possible range of modes of engaging in this practice, and extend well beyond narrow conceptions of reasoned speech or rational dialogue. This is not to say that every action (in speech or otherwise) is political – as will be discussed below, the designation 'political' has substantive dimensions as well – but just that there are a multiplicity of modes (and, by implication, media) of action in which political judgment might be at work. Perhaps all that is necessary is a sympathetic and flexible reading of the words speech, dialogue, deliberation and language, which takes them as placeholders for an array of analogous modes of action and expression. Perhaps, to qualify as a mode of political judgment, action or expression need only be *like* reasoned speech, *like* dialogue, or *like* deliberation insofar as it makes or weighs a *claim*, a claim about justice or the good life, by means of something *like* language. Thus, for example, what is really important about the stipulation that political judgment involves dialogue is not that the practice therefore requires speech *per se* but, rather, that making or weighing of claims about justice or the good life is never monological, always carried out either with or in relation to others who also judge. Even Beiner, who strongly identifies political judgment with particular modes of reasoned speech, nevertheless insists that storytelling and spectatorship (modes of communication that do not necessarily require speech) are crucial modes of engaging in political

judgment. By telling stories – in speech, yes, but also in writing, images, movement, architecture and artifacts – we 'define a conception of the human good' (Beiner, 1983, p. 126). And while it may seem a stretch to say that 'Judging is what we do . . . when we watch politics on television', Beiner's illumination of the political character of spectatorship suggests an expansive, rather than limited repertoire of possible modes of political action: 'The function of the spectator is to interpret, to understand, and to judge. If we are not mistaken, these activities of understanding and judging the drama of human affairs are at the very heart of political experience, of what it means to be politically' (Beiner, 1983, p. 161).[4] Again, the point here is that political judgment, not a particular manner of speaking, is the core of citizenship, and political judgment can be enacted in a variety of ways.

The right and the good

Not all judgment is political. As suggested above, part of what makes political judgment *political* is that it always involves others. However, along with this formal attribute, political judgment has a substantive attribute: it is judgment brought to bear on claims about justice and the good life, with the latter understood not as the prosperous life or the easy life but a life lived well in common with others. Another way to put this is to say that political judgment concerns both (good) ends and (just) means. Radical citizenship, then, would suggest a practice of political judgment that includes consideration of both means and ends, and encompasses a broad range of objects within each of these categories. The scope of application of such a practice would extend significantly beyond that which is typical of most contemporary liberal democratic societies. It would entail, for example, public consideration of basic economic arrangements – not just whether taxes are too high or too low, but whether capitalism is the best way to live – a question that scarcely can be asked in the present climate, and for whose answer no publicly viable vocabulary currently exists.

This example, alone, suggests the radical character of a conception of citizenship that hinges on political judgment exercised in both the moral and ethical spheres. The moral sphere refers to questions of justice, or right (that is, the justness or rightness of norms), adjudicated against a backdrop of generally shared commitments. The ethical sphere refers to questions concerning these basic commitments themselves, questions of the good which, in the debased public vocabulary of contemporary politics, are often rendered as questions of 'values'.[5] In other

words, the moral sphere is reserved for questions of means (by what means – prohibitions, incentives, silence, violence – can we justly meet the ends to which we are committed?) while questions of substantive ends (what should we be, want or do and why?) are located in the ethical sphere. Both liberal theory and liberal democratic institutions posit a sharp distinction between the moral and the ethical spheres, by which questions of right are publicized and political, and questions of the good are privatized and personal. Ideally, membership in a liberal polity provides citizens with formal opportunities to participate in political judgment over controversies in the moral sphere, via neutral procedures and institutions, while guaranteeing that their personal ethical commitments will never require public justification, or be subject to the political judgment of others.

Together, these ideals provide for the so-called priority of the right over the good, the ground upon which most contemporary versions of liberalism meet (Ackerman, 1980; Dworkin, 1977; Nozick, 1974; Rawls, 1971, 1993). This priority is motivated by cultural pluralism, in which citizens in a given polity are said to hold a diverse array of conceptions of the good life, and to disagree over which among them is best. Under these conditions, the bedrock liberal commitment to individual autonomy demands that such disagreements not be politicized: the 'values' that comprise a given individual's or community's conception of the good life are personal and private, and political adjudication between them risks illiberal imposition of one individual's or group's 'values' upon others; a liberal state thus strives for institutions and procedures that provide for political conflicts over matters of justice while remaining neutral as to the competing conceptions of the good life that might animate parties to such conflicts. From a slightly different angle, Jürgen Habermas's (1990) theory of discourse ethics arrives at the same conclusion. For Habermas, the question is how norms can be legitimated in the context of pluralism, and the answer is only by a process of rational argumentation (the discourse principle) through which all those affected by the norm in question can agree that it accords with their interests (the universalization principle). Normative questions of justice are located in the moral sphere, and can be resolved politically, even among those who adhere to differing conceptions of the good life, so long as they all share a basic ethical commitment to democratic legitimacy and proceed according to the rationality implicit in their conversations. However, the same cannot be said for adjudication of competing ethical claims, as these reflect private 'value' commitments deeply rooted in culture, tradition and experience, which do not admit

of rational argumentation and justification. Here again, the question of the good life is shunted to the private realm. Discourse ethicists do not think we can give public reasons in support of our ethical commitments; liberals do not think we should ever have to do so.

The priority of the right over the good, as expressed in both contemporary liberalism and discourse ethics, has come under considerable critical scrutiny from several quarters (Benhabib, 1992; MacIntyre, 1981; MacIntyre, 1988; Mouffe 1993; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1985; Walzer 1983; Warnke, 1995). Two issues are particularly relevant to a consideration of technology and citizenship, and both are rendered succinctly by Beiner, arguably liberalism's most trenchant contemporary critic. The first is the thinness of the ethical pluralism central to the self-image of liberal societies, and the incoherence of liberalism's purported commitment to neutrality on the question of the good life. As Beiner (1992, pp. 22–23) writes: 'The starting point for an understanding of liberalism is the notion that there is a distinctive liberal way of life, characterized by the aspiration to increase and enhance the prerogatives of the individual; by maximal mobility in all directions, throughout every dimension of social life; and by a tendency to turn all areas of human activity into matters of consumer preference; a way of life based on progress, growth and technological dynamism.' Liberalism, like all social orders, 'is a global dispensation – that is, a way of life that excludes other ways of life' (Beiner, 1992, p. 24). This suggests that the neutral liberal state is primarily an ideological construction. 'Is it neutral', Beiner (1992, p. 24) asks, 'about continual growth and higher productivity? Is it neutral about scientific progress? Is it neutral about the market as a means of maximizing consumer choices?' It is not, and this is because there is a vision of the good at the core of liberalism which prefigures an answer to each of these questions, 'namely, that choice in itself is the highest good' (Beiner, 1992, p. 25).

A liberal order's devotion to the principle of choice does not, however, extend to public choice-making about this principle itself for, as discussed above, the liberal dispensation defines ethical choices about the substance of the good as private, personal matters, rather than an occasion for political judgment. Thus it is that liberalism severely truncates the practice of citizenship by limiting the scope of political judgment to moral deliberation upon issues of justice (including distributive justice). As Beiner (1992, pp. 100–101) observes, liberal notions of citizenship typically turn on participation in political dialogue, 'but it is a dialogue where the topic of conversation is always the same and the parties to the discussion always utter the same monotonous formula. . . .

There is no conversation about the kinds of individual or social purposes that might be *worthy* of pursuit, since questions of this sort would violate the whole liberal agenda, premised on the bracketing of any content. Instead, the citizens discuss one thing and one thing only: who gets what for the pursuit of individual life-projects.' As will be discussed below, this tendency becomes particularly pronounced when liberalism, capitalism and technology assemble to comprise the setting in which the prospect of citizenship unfolds. A social order that systematically exempts from political judgment the ethical commitments that comprise its own account of the good life cannot support a regime of radical citizenship, at least not insofar as the word 'radical' is understood in its originary sense: of the root.

Means, object, setting

Technology relates to citizenship in three respects: as the means, object and setting of political judgment. The Internet and related digital, networked information and communication technologies are a striking example of this tripartite relationship.

As means of citizenship, technologies – especially communication technologies – can be used to mediate judgment practiced in a variety of modes. This is as true of the aerosol spray-paint can as it is of the Internet, but the latter has brought the potential of technology as a means of citizenship into high relief. While it would be misleading to suggest that the bulk of what occurs online is motivated by, or directed to, explicitly political ends, or that democratic politics is somehow what the Internet is all about, it is undeniable that the Internet has become an important instrument for those who are inclined to political judgment or action in one form or another. Whether it is the conventional politics of official leaders, governments, elections and political parties, or the marginal politics of opposition, resistance, solidarity and reform, the Internet is now a standard means of political engagement for many citizens. The modes of engagement mediated by this technology are genuinely diverse. They include: production, distribution and consumption of political information; mediation of political discussion, debate and deliberation; organization, mobilization and publicization of offline political action; as well as novel forms of tactical action within the spaces created by the medium itself (such as, for example, politically motivated denial-of-service attacks). The broad repertoires of action facilitated by this medium have, arguably, highlighted the need to recognize modes of political judgment beyond engagement in rational

speech in the context of conventional liberal democratic institutions and roles. Nevertheless, a radical conception of citizenship concerns not just a diversity of modes of engagement in political judgment, but also the substance of that against which judgment is brought to bear. Citizens, especially marginalized ones, have forever capitalized on the affordances of new media in creative ways. The novelty of the Internet, and its mediation of a broad range of modes of political judgment, do not themselves satisfy the requirements of radical citizenship in the larger technological context in which the medium is situated.

A technology such as the Internet comprises not just a medium through which we might engage in public judgment about common ends and the means to achieve them, but is also an artifact or system that *constitutes* ends and means in relation to which we might reasonably expect to exert political judgment. This to say that technology is also an object of political judgment or, at least, that it should be. In a social world in which technology often seems to appear as if by magic from behind drawn curtains, and to produce non-negotiable outcomes, it seems almost fantastic to suggest that technology is properly an object of citizenship, but this is precisely what the very best democratic critiques of technology have taught us: that technology is 'like legislation' (Feenberg, 1999, p. 131); that 'artifacts have politics' (Winner, 1986, p. 19); that 'code is law' (Lessig, 1999, p. 3). Technology is properly an object of citizenship because it is intimately bound up in the establishment and enforcement of prohibitions and permissions, the distribution of power and resources, and the structure of human practices and relationships. In short, justice is at stake in the design, development, regulation and governance of technological devices and systems, and this recommends their elevation from technical to political matters, the establishment of what Latour (2005, p. 14) has recently termed 'an object-oriented democracy'.

Here, too, the Internet provides a case in point, for how else but as matters of justice that demand political consideration should we define issues of access and connectivity, protocol, domain and network regulation, intellectual property, and electronic surveillance? Yet, despite the existence of highly mobilized activist constituencies surrounding these and other issues, the design, development and regulation of the Internet has been more or less exempt from formal, democratic political determination, left instead to the private interests of scientists, engineers, military and police agencies, major corporations, technocrats and consumers, a pattern typical of most technological development. It is in this sense that formal de-politicization of technology stands among the

most serious democratic deficits of the present age. Still, social studies of technology have taught us that distinct technologies achieve their design, and assume their character and meaning, after a long, non-linear process of negotiation, appropriation and adaptation involving multiple actors in shifting relationships and contexts (Bijker et al., 1992). These moments provide opportunities for the exertion of judgment, including political judgment, at several points and in a variety of modes. It is under this rubric that we might consider illicit distribution of encryption and anonymizing technology, use of peer-to-peer file sharing networks, and circulation of free and open source software as acts of political judgment.

Radical citizenship in a technological context would seem to require that technologies such as the Internet be approached as objects of political judgment, whether systematically via formal institutions or haphazardly in the process of their social construction. Achieving this would be a step in a direction that might be called radical, insofar as it would demand significant restructuring of well-established relationships between science, technology, capital and the state, and a corresponding re-distribution of social, economic and political power. However, it is not clear that simply subjecting technological development to the political judgment of citizens would be radical in the sense of opening it (and them) to the ethical question of technology as an end that defines the good life. It is possible that citizens would ask themselves this question when engaged in judgment over a technological controversy – such as, for example, over whether the state should have unfettered access to the records of Internet service providers – but it is not necessary. One need not contest the technological dispensation in order to struggle against the unjust direction imposed upon it by Microsoft, AT&T, Verizon and the Pentagon. It is more likely that citizens engage in such contests because of commitments that do not challenge the ethical basis of technology whatsoever. Indeed, it is at least plausible that the imperative to subject technology to political judgment in the moral sphere arises from the same ethical commitment to mastery that drives the technological enterprise itself. This is perhaps what Heidegger (1977) had in mind when he observed, ominously, that all attempts to control technology by democratic means are themselves technological behavior.

Citizenship in the eclipse

In the 1990s, when governments across the liberal democratic world declared the imperative to build national and global digital network

infrastructures, they were making a claim about the good life. When AT&T sells its high-speed Internet service with the promise 'Your World. Delivered', it is making a claim about the good life. And when progressive activists decry the digital divide they are not only passing judgment on the injustice of unequal access to important tools and resources, they are also making, or at least confirming, a claim about the good life. A radical practice of citizenship will reckon with these claims, which are either explicitly or implicitly ethical claims about ends that are worth pursuing, claims about the best way to live.

Technological societies do not provide a hospitable setting for this sort of reckoning. A technological society is one that is saturated by complex technological devices and systems, and which experiences perpetual technological dynamism; it is one in which material life, and in particular the economy, is bound up tightly with technological activity; a society in which security, prosperity, freedom and progress are identified culturally with technological development; a society in which convenience, commodity and readiness-to-hand are highly valued; a society in which the instrumental rationality characteristic of technology, whereby the questioning of ends is routinely subsumed under the optimization of means, penetrates otherwise non-technological spheres of interest and activity (Borgmann, 1984; Ellul, 1964; Grant, 1969; Simpson, 1995). In this sense, technologies are not just instruments but, as Winner (1986, p. 12) contends, 'forms of life': 'As they become woven into the texture of everyday existence, the devices, techniques, and systems we adopt shed their tool-like qualities to become part of our very humanity. In an important sense we become the beings who work on assembly lines, who talk on telephones, who do our figuring on pocket calculators, who eat processed foods, who clean our homes with powerful chemicals.'

As a way of being in the world technology mitigates against other ways of being in the world, including citizenship, especially when the latter is understood to be a practice of political judgment that includes ethical questions. It does this by so thoroughly occupying the 'foreground' of our experience that it eclipses both its own ethical background and any possible alternatives (Borgmann, 1984, pp. 48–56). As Lorenzo Simpson (1995, p. 40) observes, critical self-understanding requires that our experience 'pose questions to us about our way of being, about how we live our lives'. This is the essential ground upon which political judgment of ethical claims must rest: 'Our earnest seeking after "the good life" requires the problematization of prereflective interpretations, a virtualization of the claims they make on us, in that

they must be cast into a space of possible alternatives. . . . Such a dislocation is a manifestation of our freedom from unreflected prejudices, a freedom and displacement which are necessary if we are to continue to distinguish meaningfully between the 'good life' and the way we just happen to see things, and to seek the former' (Simpson, 1995, 40). In a technological society, the question of what is good, or how to live, is prejudicially answered in the very fabric of its material constitution, yet it provides little or no space in which the claims technology makes upon us can be confronted with viable alternatives. And even if such space existed, it is not clear that inhabitants of technological societies any longer have at their disposal an ethical vocabulary that is displaced from what they see in the technology that surrounds them. As George Grant (1969, p. 139) has written: 'All coherent languages beyond those which serve the drive to unlimited freedom through technique have been broken up in the coming to be of what we are. . . . We have been left with no words which cleave together and summon out of uncertainty the good of which we may sense the dispossession.' Thus the pervasive and brilliant everydayness of technological experience works to obscure its contingency as an ethical claim that might be subject to political judgment in relation to competing claims: 'It reigns as common sense, as the obvious way of doing things which requires no discussion and, more important, is not accessible to discussion. It is understood in the sense of being taken for granted' (Borgmann, 1984, p. 35).

In this eclipse of the ethical dimension of political judgment, contemporary liberalism conspires with technology against radical citizenship. It does so not only by recommending strongly against the politicization of ethical questions, but by giving an account of the good life that resembles very closely the account given in technology. In the section 'The Right and the Good', the prevailing ethic of liberalism was rendered as commitment to the principle of choice, but when liberalism is held together with technology it becomes clear that this commitment is the token of an even deeper devotion to 'that primal western affirmation . . . the affirmation of human beings as "will"' (Grant, 1974, pp. 63–64). Under the liberal dispensation, the good life is understood as individual autonomy and self-realization achieved through free exertion of the will, an account that comports well with a technological society's promises of freedom, mastery, convenience and choice. This is the root to which a radical practice of citizenship in technological society must address itself. To do so publicly will be a challenge, for liberalism and technology form a circle of mutual reinforcement that is difficult to interrupt: 'Freedom's great achievement is that it allowed modern technology to appear . . .

Technology's great achievement was that it allowed freedom to flourish' (Grant, 1974, p. 3). Borgmann (1984, pp. 92–94) goes so far as to posit an ethical identity between liberalism and technology: 'Liberal democracy is enacted as technology. It does not leave the question of the good life open but answers it along technological lines . . . when we promote a just society along liberal democratic lines, we also advance the technological society and its specific and dubious notion of the good life.' While denying the possibility of political judgment of ethical claims in the public sphere, liberalism nevertheless advances a particular vision of the good life that just happens to be the same as the vision offered by technological society. And, as with the claims of technology, the claims of liberalism are so pervasive they scarcely register as claims at all. Liberal, capitalist, technological society need not defend its claim to being the best way to live, because it is the only way.

Taken together, technology and liberalism cast a sort of spell under which the space of political judgment shrinks from view, or at least that portion of it in which ethical claims about the substance of the good life might be critically engaged. For all its promise in mediating diverse modes of engagement in political judgment on questions of justice, the Internet also reinforces conditions that undermine the possibility of bringing political judgment to bear on the ethical dimensions of living in a technological society. Along with being a means and object of political judgment, the Internet is part of the broader setting in which the prospects of radical citizenship are situated. It represents a way of being in the world that does not conduce to being in the world as a citizen who engages with others over the question of what it means to live well under contemporary conditions. Perhaps the first task for radical citizenship in the age of the Internet is to reclaim the space in which political judgment can be brought to bear on ethical claims, and to refuse to accept prejudicially that the question of the good life in the midst of technology can be closed with the answer given by technology itself.

Notes

1. If the question is digital technology's threat to rights of privacy, the answer is encryption or anonymizing technology; if the question is the digital divide, the answer is more extensive access to technology.
2. For more on contemporary debates surrounding political judgment see Beiner (1983) and Beiner & Nedelsky (2001).
3. To be sure, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo also spoke, wrote, organized and ultimately engaged the formal political system. My point here is that they were acting politically from the moment they simply stood on the Plaza.

4. Beiner's redemption of the spectator is not an endorsement of the non-politics of the mass spectacle characteristic of North American representative democracies. For his full account see Beiner (1983, pp. 159–62).
5. 'Values' is a term smuggled into political vocabulary from the grammar of the market. Aside from cheapening ethical commitments and diminishing the gravity of questioning them (for nothing is so easily compromised, disregarded, or exchanged as a mere 'value'), this language immediately transforms them into private, subjective choices, unintelligible in the political sphere. For a complete critique of values discourse, see Andrew (1995). For the place of values discourse in technological society see Winner (1986, pp. 155–63).

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4

Civic Identity and Net Activism: The Frame of Radical Democracy

Peter Dahlgren

Introduction

While the discourses about the dilemmas or even crises of liberal democracy have become familiar, especially in its emphasis on the decline in civic engagement, we also witness a kind of resurgence of political involvement, but mostly in ways different from traditional party politics. The numbers involved are probably comparatively small (it is difficult to accurately assess the magnitude), yet the energy and intensity manifested are encouraging. Extra-parliamentarian groups and movements, NGO's, global networks, and so on represent a re-engagement in politics, not least in regard to what is often called 'anti-globalization', but more accurately could be termed alter-globalization, since the critiques are not directed at globalization per se, but rather at its neo-liberal character. In fact, those engaged in such oppositional politics are often active at the global level themselves. Much of this engagement not only makes use of the Internet and other newer, interactive communication technologies (such as mobile telephony), but is in fact quite dependent on it. Without the technology to facilitate this participation, much alter-globalization politics would simply not happen. Yet, the technology, even if we at some level deem it necessary, can never be sufficient. Only a simplistic position of technological determinism would argue that the Internet 'causes' such participation. We have to understand such civic engagement in broader socio-cultural terms. Still, the technology facilitates, helps prepare, and tends to define the conditions and character of the involvement.

In this chapter I will be exploring some of the theoretical parameters around the notions of citizenship and democratic participation, with alter-globalization politics and the use of the Internet as my empirical

referent. My analytic horizon will be that of radical democracy, especially as formulated in the writings of Chantal Mouffe, as well as the concept of civic cultures that I have been working with in recent years (Dahlgren, 2002; 2003; 2006). What I hope to show is that the radical democracy perspective, as a strong version of the republican theory of citizenship, opens the door to fruitful analyses of identity in regard to civic engagement and civic agency. The radical democracy perspective, given its theoretic premises, allows us to probe citizenship in terms of cultural theory, opening up citizenship as a category to be interrogated in terms of meaning, practices, and subjectivity. Such a 'cultural turn' extends the notion of citizenship by connecting it to the theme of agency, moving it beyond the rather formal boundaries usually set by political science and political theory. Given the central role of the Internet in alter-globalization movements, it offers a handy concrete focus for probing the dynamics of civic identity and agency.

The first section provides a brief entry into the themes of disengagement, re-engagement, and citizenship. From there I explore the notions of civic agency and identity, and highlight the centrality of the radical democracy framework. Connecting this with the model of civic cultures, I suggest that civic identities encompass two fundamental dimensions. In the second part of the discussion, I turn, more concretely, to the theme of the Internet and civic engagement, and follow up specifically on the alter-globalization movements. I conclude with some reflections on the practices around the Net in these movements, and how they interplay reciprocally with civic identities.

Disengagement, re-engagement, and citizenship

We must first acknowledge that there can be – from the standpoint of citizens themselves – many good reasons for not participating politically, ranging from a sense of personal powerlessness and despair over one's life circumstances, to a sense of bitterness of having been abandoned or betrayed by political elites. This demoralization with formal politics is a theme addressed by many today (for example, Putnam, 2000; Sandel, 1996; Eliasoph, 1998; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). Many people simply do not have enough time and energy as a result of stressful life circumstances; people can find it difficult to manage work life (or unemployment), leisure, and the role of citizen. Moreover, these factors interplay with a dominant culture that emphasizes consumption and promotes in various ways a retreat from the public sphere into depoliticized enclaves (Boggs, 2000). Indeed, even the codes and conventions of social interaction can inhibit talk about politics (Eliasoph, 1998).

Of course, there *are* notable exceptions to these trends, as illustrated, for example, in the political engagement among US citizens since the presidential campaign of 2004. Election campaigns typically tend to raise the political temperature and to invigorate otherwise semi-dormant political sentiments among citizens. In the US, the climate of increased fears about security in the US – both national and individual – as well as pervasive economic uncertainties resulted in heightened political passions and consequent political polarization of the citizenry. Generally, however, I would argue that the growing structural gaps between organized political life and people's everyday realities, reinforce a sense of distance from the political system. This growing atmosphere of 'anti-politics' must be understood as the consequence of the inability of the political system to meet social expectations, and also of an absence of alternative and compelling political visions.

A different, cautiously optimistic view can of course be justified if we look at what is happening within what can be called 'new politics'. The ostensible political apathy and disaffiliation from the established political system may not necessarily signal a disinterest in politics per se. That is, if we look beyond formal electoral politics, we can see various signs that suggest that many people have not abandoned engagement with the political, but have rather refocused their political attention outside the parliamentary system. For example, many groups are directly targeting large global corporations for their activities in regard to the environment, working conditions, or other issues rather than going via the formal political system (Danaher, K. & Mark, J., 2003; Amoore, 2005; Eschle & Maiguashca, 2005; Aronowitz & Gautney, 2003; Bennett, 2004) or they are in the process of redefining just what constitutes the political. We also see frames of reference and engagement beyond the borders of the nation-state, as evidenced by, for example, transnational social movements. The boundaries between politics, cultural values, identity processes, and local self-reliance measures become fluid (Beck, 1998; Bennett, 2003). Politics becomes not only an instrumental activity for achieving concrete goals, but also an expressive activity.

In this context of de- and re-engagement, the notion of citizenship takes on obvious importance. A common and convenient starting point in discussions about citizenship is to say that the concept traditionally builds upon a set of rights and obligations, historically evolved in society, and underscores universalism and equality. In the modern world it has almost always been linked to the nation-state. In this sense, citizenship is treated as a formal, legal framework that underpins democracy. However, the discontinuity between formal inclusion, and the dimensions of civil, political, social, and (more recently) cultural citizenship

has actually been a historical driveshaft for a lot of political activity: democracy has witnessed many struggles, as various groups and cultures have made claims for inclusion, recognition, and redistribution. These new demands have made the traditional notion of citizenship problematic (see, for example, Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994; Spinner, 1994). Struggles based on identity and difference demand not just legal or formal status, but political and social recognition, and even economic redistribution. We witness this for example, in regard to gender, including sexual preference, medical and sexual control over the body (see, for example, Plummer, 2003), ethnicity, and diasporas.

The demand for recognition, for instance, points to the importance of citizens to develop as autonomous individuals with self-esteem and self-confidence. The relevance of recognition in the context of political struggles has been receiving increased attention within philosophy and social theory. The work of Honneth (see, for example, Honneth, 1995; Fraser & Honneth, 2003) has played an important role here. Authors such as Taylor (1994) address the need for a politics of recognition specifically in the context of cultural difference. Moreover, in the wake of globalization and the growth of transnational actors, communities, and networks, we see the themes of global citizenship, post-national citizenship, and global civil society increasingly appearing in the debates (Miller, 2000; Delanty, 2000; Sassen, 2002; and Linklater, 2002 offer helpful overviews).

To bring some order in the many debates about citizenship, Isin and Turner (2002, p. 2) identify three axes of contention over citizenship: *extent*, having to do with rules and norms pertaining to inclusion and exclusion; *content*, addressing rights and responsibilities; and *depth*, the 'thickness' or 'thinness' of citizenship in terms of how the identities of members should be understood and accommodated. Certainly in terms of the history of democracy, the definitions and guarantees of formal citizenship have been major political accomplishments and must be defended. Yet, if the formal, universalist and statist concept of citizenship was a starting point, the newer challenges facing democracies today evoke the need for a complementary view that is differentiated and based on agency.

Thus, we have a second, complementary notion of citizenship, that which is based on political agency. Its premise is that democratic universalism and genuine civic equality remain an unfinished project, and it asserts that there are key differences among citizens that must be recognized and politically addressed. Its contentions have to do precisely with the extent, content, and depth of citizenship. Traditional

class politics was a manifestation of such 'incomplete' democracy. There remain today conditions such as marginalization, powerlessness, and exploitation specific to certain groups, in regard to, for example, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This opens the door to a politics of difference, a starting point for political agency; differences as such are not seen as insoluble problems, but rather as a point of departure for civic participation. Political communities that thus arise in the process can be seen as the result of concrete civic practices (Stewart, 2001, p. 208). If the first, state-centered version can be seen as a *received* citizenship, the second, agency-based notion can be viewed as what Stewart (2001) calls an *achieved* citizenship.

Agency in radical democracy

The notion of achieved citizenship, based in agency and difference, resonates clearly with the radical democracy wing of republicanism. The most characteristic element of republicanism is its insistence on the active participation of citizens in democratic self-governance (Barber, 1984; Petit, 1997; van Gunsteren, 1998). As Tocqueville observed in his study of the US in the 1830s, involvement in public life is seen not just a duty, but as something offering its own personal rewards. Republicanism asserts that democracy requires civic virtues from its citizens, and cultivating these virtues turns citizens into better people by developing abilities that would otherwise remain unfulfilled. In terms of the three axes of tension around the concept of citizenship (Isin &Turner, 2002, p. 2), republicanism can be said to reside on the strong side of all three: *extent* (republicanism strive for inclusion), *content* (responsibilities and virtues as well as rights are emphasized), and *depth* (republicanism leans towards 'thickness' concerning the identities of citizens).

The radical democratic turn in republicanism is informed by post-structural theory; it combines notions about the contextual nature of identity and subject positions with a view of political struggle as shaped by ever-shifting contingencies. There is no end point for conflict (or for democracy). We–they boundaries are continuously being redrawn as new issues and conflicts arise. It accentuates the centrality of difference and heterogeneity, and the importance of progressive groups building alliances. Even one individual can at a particular point in time encompass several (even contradictory) political positions by virtue of multiple group identities or memberships. The basic strategy is to encourage the development of alliances between groups that share similar, progressive political views.

Radical democracy retains a republican quality in its emphasis on agency and in its view of the common good. It is anchored in a commitment to democratic values and procedures, but also on the importance of difference, clearly a challenging vision.[1] While nobody anticipates that all citizens will become embodiments of republican virtue, there are no doubt different levels of anticipation, as well as different notions as to what portion of the citizenry needs to manifest such virtues in order to constitute a critical mass – in different societies and at various points in history. Like the democratic ideal in general, republicanism can be seen as containing a certain mythic dimension, providing an inspiring normative vision. At the same time, in terms of our discussion here, this republican imaginary links up with the notion of citizenship as agency, as achievement, and the importance of identity.

Dual civic identities

Citizenship has increasingly become an object of social theory and analysis (see, for example, Beiner, 1995; Janoski, 1998), not least from the standpoint of feminist horizons (Pateman, 1989; Lister, 1997; Voet, 1998; Dean, 1997; Phillips, 1993; Lloyd, 2005). Indeed, we see the emergence, since the 1990s, of multidisciplinary citizenship studies (Isin & Turner, 2002; see also the journal *Citizenship Studies*). There is a particular strand of literature here, however, that is based in cultural theory (for example, Preston, 1997; Isin & Wood, 1999; Stevenson, 2003) as well as political philosophy (for example, Clarke, 1996; Trend, 1996), that indirectly strengthens the radical democracy project by highlighting the centrality of identity in understanding citizenship as a mode of social agency. In essence, the argument is that in order to be able to act as a citizen, to participate in achieved citizenship, it is necessary that one can see oneself as a citizen, as subjectively encompassing the attributes of agency that this social category may involve.

In this late modern perspective, the emergence of the self is treated as a reflexive project, an ongoing process of the continuous shaping and reshaping of identity, in response to pluralized social forces, cultural currents, and personal contexts. Moreover, identity is understood as plural: in our daily lives we operate in a multitude of different 'worlds' or realities; as subjects, we are positioned differently in different circumstances, making use of different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules, roles, and modes of discourse (among the large literature that addresses this theme, useful points of entry or overviews can be found in Hetherington, 1998; Taylor & Spencer, 2004). We are to varying

degrees composite people, and hopefully, the civic dimension will have a pertinent position in the ensemble. In short, people's identities as citizens (however defined), with their sense of belonging to political collectivities – and perceived possibilities for participating in politics – become crucial elements in the life of democracy.

Mouffe's poststructural sensibilities add forceful dynamic insistence to the above considerations. Her vision of a pluralistic democracy (see for example Chapter 4 in Mouffe, 2000) emphasizes not only that subject positions change and evolve according to contingencies, but also that identities in the context of democratic engagement are rooted in antagonisms with other groups – ever-shifting we–they constellations. Moreover, she mobilizes Wittgenstein's notion of language games, making the point that the very idea of neutral or rational dialogue is untenable. For Wittgenstein, agreement on language necessitates agreement on forms of life. This in turn projects one inevitably into issues of power and antagonism. Inevitably, rhetoric, persuasion, compromise – rather than rational consensus – prevail. There is a performative emphasis here, an 'agonistic' premise, rather than a demand for 'authenticity' in political discussion, that has echoes of Arendt (see also Passerin d'Entrèves, 1994).

In her view of democracy's dynamics, Mouffe does not build on Habermasian communicative rationality, but rather on argument, performance, and the hope that one can at least reach compromise. In her perspective, the goal is not to avoid conflict; on the contrary, she assumes that conflict is a built-in potential in all social relations and in all kinds of talk. She calls this perspective agonistic pluralism, a political culture where the forms of interaction and power are compatible with democratic values, where conflict takes place between 'adversaries' rather than 'enemies'. Mouffe's vision is predicated on shared democratic rules of the game, a minimal, bedrock of unifying allegiance to democratic values and procedures.

This leads me to suggest that in terms of civic identities there are actually two dimensions at work in Mouffe's writing. She speaks of loyalty and adherence to the rules of the game; indeed she underscores '… the crucial role played by passions and affects in securing allegiance to democratic values' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 95). Here we have the common, shared commitment to democratic norms and ideals; let us call this *generalized civic identity*. In entering into political conflict, in asserting interests and taking sides that construct we–they antagonisms, we have a *specialized civic identity*. There is of course a tension between them: the temptation is ever present that the specialized civic identity will

become so strong that it will marginalize the general civic identity; in other words, that the pursuit of particular interests will lead people to compromise on the rules of the game to achieve them. This suggests, from another standpoint, the precariousness of democracy: for citizens to identify more strongly with the democratic system, with the collective well being of all, than with their own specialized interests, requires a deep-rooted, pervasive, and well-functioning civic culture. Democratic virtue doesn't come easy; we see the problem everywhere, but perhaps most obviously in younger democracies where civic cultures have not yet had time to flourish.

Civic cultures and the new media

The civic cultures perspective tries to conceptualize the factors that can promote or impede political participation. We use the plural form to underscore that there are many forms of civic culture and many ways of enacting citizenship in late modern society. With the notion of political agency as a starting point, we see citizenship as a mode of individual and collective action, and try to probe the cultural conditions of such agency. To approach citizenship in terms of identity leads us to ask what are the cultural factors that can impinge on this identity, and foster (or hinder) people's perceptions of their (multifarious) civic selves. Cultures consist of patterns of communication, practices, and meaning; they provide taken for granted orientations – factual and normative – as well as other resources for collective life. They are internalized, intersubjectively, guiding and informing action, speech, and understanding. We can thus think of civic cultures as cultural patterns, anchored in our everyday lives, in which identities as citizens are an integral part.

Such cultures are important in creating climates that facilitate engagement in society's political life. Civic cultures are potentially both strong and vulnerable. They can shape citizens; they can serve to empower or disempower citizens. They sit precariously in the face of political and economic power, and the mechanisms of social class. They are shaped by an array of factors: the nature of the legal system, factors of social structure, economics, education, organizational possibilities, infrastructure, spatiality, which can all have their impact. For our purposes here, however, we emphasize the media as a set of factors, especially the Internet.

We can think of civic cultures as resources, as storehouses of assets that individuals and groups draw upon and make use of in their activities as citizens. This calls to mind Putnam's (2000) notion of 'social capital'; in

his framework, such resources reside in the social connections within networks of reciprocal relations (Putnam, 2000, pp. 21–24). However, from my perspective his sociological framework does not go far enough to analyze the processes of meaning-making and subjectivity that we have in mind with the notion of civic cultures. Conceptually, civic cultures can be seen as comprised of six dimensions of mutual reciprocity (fuller discussion can be found in Dahlgren, 2006; 2003): the first three are familiar from the established tradition of political communication, the latter three emerge from cultural theory: (1) knowledge, (2) values, (3) trust and affinity, (4) spaces, (5) practices and skills, (6) identities. Identities as citizens comprise the key dimension for us here, but this dimension of course interplays with the other five.

As a foundation for agency, identities can be seen as the centerpiece of civic cultures, with the other dimensions contributing reciprocally to shaping the conditions of its existence. For example, identities build on knowledge and values, they can be reinforced by trust, and embodied in particular spaces via practices – pursuing issues by the use of civic skills – that all serve to reinforce identities. Alternatively, the spiral of course can be negative, downward. Today, identity is understood as plural: in our daily lives we operate in a multitude of different 'worlds' or realities; we carry within us different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules and roles for different circumstances, we operate in different registers in different contexts. Particularly the young are self-consciously involved with 'identity work', and the links between such research concerns, which range from sociology and cultural studies, on the one hand, to political studies, on the other, should be evident.

Analytically, a robust civic identity implies an empowered political agent, which articulates with the notion of achieved citizenship we mentioned earlier. Engagement in issues becomes meaningful, citizens feel that they, in concert with others, can in some way make a political difference. At some point, of course, empowerment must be experienced as resulting in some kind of concrete, objective results, or at least as making a meaningful contribution in political struggle.

It is not surprising that much of this new politics coincides with the rise of Internet and other new communication technologies, given the civic communication that these technologies can facilitate (see van de Donk, et al., 2004; de Jong et al., 2005; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Jordan & Taylor, 2004). While the discussions about the poor health of democracy intensified during the 1990s, the Internet was rapidly leading a media revolution. It did not take long for many observers to connect the two phenomena in an optimistic way. That new information

and communication technologies are revolutionizing just about all spheres of life in late modern society is of course not news, but there remains ambiguity as to the extent to which they are actually enhancing democracy (see, for example, Anderson & Cornfield, 2003; Jenkins & Thorburn, 2003). The Internet's political economy has veered unabated toward the commercialization that characterizes the traditional mass media; moreover, the Net has also become an integrated element in the dynamics of global capitalism (Schiller, 1999). Market logic together with emerging legal frameworks may well serve to diminish the Net as a properly 'communicative space' (Lessig, 1999; 2001). Moreover, the use of the Net for political purposes is clearly minor compared with other purposes to which it is put (see, for example, various chapters in Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). Thus, there are clear threats to the civic potential of the Internet, and it certainly cannot be seen as offering any 'quick fix' for democracy.

However, it is precisely in the arena of new politics that the new media become not only relevant, but also crucial: it is especially the capacity for 'horizontal communication' here that has focused attention on the Internet's unique role and status. Both technologically and economically, access to the Net (and other new technologies, such as mobile phones) has helped facilitate the growth of massive, coordinated digital networks of activists. At present, it is in the fissures generated by the turbulence of the traditional media, and changing socio-cultural patterns, that we can begin to glimpse the best hopes for a civic culture and democracy that are resourced by the Net.[2]

The alter-globalization movement

The neo-liberal hegemony in the contemporary processes of globalization is being directly challenged by a vast array of activists, movements, networks, institutional, and global reformers (see for example Aronowitz & Gautney, 2003). Given the loose, overlapping, interwoven and at times transitory character of these organizations, it is difficult to specify in any detail the boundaries of the alter-globalization movement. For example, some environmental and feminist groups clearly place themselves in this camp, while others do not. From the standpoint of the dimensions of civic cultures, we can at least say that despite considerable heterogeneity, these fluid groups share very similar sets of values in regard to their views on democracy and social justice; such communality is expressed, for example, in the large and sprawling manifestations of the World Social Forum, as well as in its

many regional, national and even local spin-offs, where we can observe the emergence of the kinds of alliances between different groups with compatible aims that Mouffe discusses. How can we describe and characterize the practices and skills involved in such political engagement? Thus far, we have only limited empirical work to go on, but some studies are offering insights. My discussion here leans on the work of Cammaerts & van Audenhove (2003) and Bennett (2003).

To begin with, we can distinguish between a number of different kinds of organizations within the movement (though the four mentioned here cannot claim to be exhaustive): (1) There are few large umbrella, or 'hub' organizations, such as the Association for Progressive Communication (www.apc.org) that serves a coordinating function for many other member groups. They are generally advocative and try to ecumenically represent the broad interests of alternative groups. They also do much to actively promote the use of new media by pooling expertise and resources. (2) Advocacy organizations are focused advocacy groups that provide a virtual platform for interaction, organization, communication, and mobilization. Attac (www.attac.org) is a typical (and well-known) such organization. While the use of the Net is crucial, such groups (often with local chapters) encourage face-to-face interaction as well. They actively try to develop alternative discourses, influence public opinion (not least by interfacing with the dominant mass media) and impact on policies. (3) Portal organizations, often issue-oriented, function as virtual clearinghouses where users are directed toward other sites and organizations via links. LabourStart (www.LabourStart.org) is one such portal organization. (4) Media organizations serve as key information centers. They can offer forums, mailing lists, networking, mobilization, alternative information and points of view. Indymedia (www.Indymedia.org) is not only a good example of such Web organizations, but, since the time of its emergence during the Seattle WTO demonstrations, has grown, with over 100 outlets, to become a major part of the movement's informational infrastructure, offering not least alternative journalistic accounts of important developments and criticisms of the major media.

If we consider the advocacy groups, which constitute the core of the movement, their internal Net-based communication activities can impact positively on the organizational dynamics of the groups, the building of coalitions between them, outreach to new potential participants, strategic communication with opponents, and access to spectator publics. There are also drawbacks: the ease of joining is matched by the ease of pulling out. It is thus difficult to maintain organizational

control or coherent frames of collective identity. Also, the norms of openness and participation can result in blunting the direction, agendas, and goals of the group. Finally, the very fluid nature of the groups and their memberships mean that organizations can unintentionally morph into something its original members had not intended, as transitory membership results in a new profile. Yet the strengths associated with the media technology – and the democratic organizational ideals – generally far outweigh the disadvantages.

The externally oriented opinion activities of advocacy groups can take a variety of forms. Along with the mass demonstrations and ongoing criticisms of national governments and transnational institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, one of the most common is the 'permanent campaign'. This is usually directed at specific global corporations. Through criticism, argumentation, and humor, advocacy groups attempt to generate publicity that will result in pressure leading to changes in corporate policies. Political consumption, especially boycotts, has become a common strategy (for example, anti-sweatshop campaigns); in fact many major global corporations (not least Microsoft itself) have what can be described as permanent Net-based campaigns against them.

The communicative practices at work here have been summarized by Bennett (2003) as follows:

- Decentralized: the organizations are in themselves fluid, as noted above. They tend also to be 'flat' and non-hierarchical. Networks can be rapidly 'reconfigured' as groups and memberships come and go.
- Ideologically thin: the sentiment of 'anti-ism' is strong. But interviews have revealed among activists personal discourses rich in terms of individual identity and lifestyle narratives. The connection between engagement and personal values is strong. 'Ideology' here functions more at the level of a shared normative perspectives on particular issues.
- Porous boundaries with the traditional mass media: activist media can impact on the information provided by the mass media. Movements use micro-media (for example, e-mail) and such meso-media Net channels as organization sites, alternative news, blogs, e-zines in a variety of ways (including logo campaigns and 'culture jams'). Materials from these outlets have at times been picked up by the dominant macro- (mass) media. Increasingly, also, activist media serve as journalistic sources – and continue the erosion of neat definitions of who is/is not a journalist.

We can thus posit that the Net constitutes an important factor in the emergence of civic cultures that potentially support and manifest radical democracy. This has to do of course in part with the character of the technology, but also with how this technology interfaces with contemporary socio-cultural trends of political import. Late modern patterns of dispersion of cultural heterogeneity and the processes of individuation – that tend, among other things, to undermine traditional party politics – are seemingly more congruent with versions of 'new politics' and its parameters. Moreover, the decentered and contingent late modern self, as theorized not least by Mouffe, emerges as a key feature of the agonistic, democratic pluralism that she envisions. Space does not permit a full treatment of all the dimensions of civic culture in relation to the alter-globalization movement, but I wish to highlight a few points, mainly in regard to practices and skills, that can suggest the dynamic interplay that can nourish civic identities.

Practices, skills, and civic identities

At a general level, the Net is obviously a resource that facilitates progressive versions of civic culture (though we should not forget that it also allows for undemocratic, racist and neo-fascist politics as well). Citizenship as social agency is finding new forms of expression in this milieu; the sense of empowerment that follows from much Net activism supports newer forms of citizen identities, in a reciprocal manner, via the interplay with the other dimensions of civic cultures. Knowledge and competencies are being shared and spread through activist networks; such networking continually reiterates core democratic values, which in turn support the civic affinity needed to participate in network-based politics. These then become embodied in the various organizational, communicative, political civic practices and skills associated with the movements. These practices in turn serve to strengthen identities, values, trust, and affinities (see Dahlgren, 2007).

Looking a bit more closely at practices and skills, civic agency must be embodied in concrete, recurring ways of doing things – individually and collectively – relevant for diverse situations. Such practices solidify both the specialized and generalized aspects of civic identities, of being both engaged in particular issues and interests, while at the same time enhancing one's self-understanding as a citizen committed to the democratic system. Practices must have an element of the routine, of the taken for granted about them, if they are to be a part of civic cultures. Yet, practices can be and are learned; they often require specific

skills, especially communicative competencies. Thus, to be able to speak, read, write, work a computer, and get around on the Internet can all be seen as competencies important for democratic practices. Education will therefore always play a key role in nurturing democracy, even if its contents and pedagogic approaches periodically need to be scrutinized and debated. To engage in practices and to develop the necessary skills for political participation is a profoundly empowering experience, which is inexorably linked with the formation of civic identities. To have effective practices and skills is an important foundation of our sense of self, of who we are, in the context of civic agency and in all other circumstances as well.

Agre (2004), while decidedly not aligning himself with radical democracy, nonetheless offers some reflections that further develop this view. He in fact takes many of the proponents of republicanism to task for largely ignoring the character and substance of social skills that civic agents must actually apply. He argues that citizens must be able to function in their 'public personae', and while civic values are essential, agency in political contexts depends on skills, and that these are developed through practices in the context of one's lived realities. These skills have to do, among other things, with social interaction, with the capacity to define issues, and to recognize, define, and exploit the relevant political situations for dealing with them. Net-based activism also includes organizing, mobilizing, initiating and running discussions, and exchanging information and experiences. Communicative competence – for example civic talk – is important, but he, like Mouffe, is critical of – and goes beyond – the artificial constraints of Habermasian notions of deliberative democracy (see Dahlgren, 2006).

He develops the notion of an 'issue lattice' to describe the elements involved; this lattice has four dimensions: first, vertical, where citizens working at the national level on an issue will try to connect with those at the regional, sub-national level, or at the global level; second, geographic, where those who are active within a particular geographic jurisdiction will network with their counterparts in other jurisdictions; third, institutional, where activists staking out a given issue in a particular institutional setting will connect with others in comparable institutional settings; fourth, ideological, in which citizens who define shared positions on different issues in similar institutional contexts will often develop alliances.

The lattice presupposes considerable social and communicative skill, and underscores a point of departure in concrete issues. It also summarizes in a schematic way much of the activities that Net-based civic

agency is enacted; the key role of the Internet in this context is not so much the forums of deliberation that it offers, but rather its opportunities for building networks around issues. This requires the capacity to define and promote positions on them, recruit support, cement relationships, and follow up with the necessary organizational skills to keep the momentum going. If we link up again with civic identities, it is clear that subjects who engage in the practices around defining and promoting issues are on the one hand embodying their specific civic identities – the we–they collectivities – of agonistic pluralist democracy. At the same time they are cultivating a sense of themselves as generalized actors who support the vision, rules, and procedures of democracy – and contributing the vitality of its civic culture.

Certainly anti-globalization politics via the Internet can be discussed in terms of, say, classic liberalism, but it is my sense that the radical democracy frame offers a more powerful way for understanding Net activism in relation to contemporary socio-cultural evolution and the present tensions of democracy. This frame also provides a more compelling account of civic identities, which, viewed through the lenses of civic culture, helps us analytically grasp the notion of citizenship in a manner that can mediate between larger political contexts and perspectives of situated human agency and subjectivity. And even if it does not give us any quick answers to the fundamental questions about democracy that remain with us, this must still be viewed as an important asset.

Notes

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1. Key texts here are Laclau & Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1993), and Mouffe (1992, 1993, 2000, 2005). For a short overview, see Rasmussen and Brown (2002). For an extended treatment of Laclau & Mouffe, see also Smith (1998).
2. A convenient starting point for accessing research on these developments is the website of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement at the University of Washington (www.engagedcitizen.org/).

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5
Online Direct Action: Hacktivism and Radical Democracy

Tim Jordan

Introduction

Radical democracy is manifest in both political actions and political infrastructures. This chapter will take up such actions and infrastructures related to the Internet by focusing on hacktivism, a movement devoted to online direct action. Examining hacktivism will allow political practices specific to the Internet to be the basis of analysis. Forms of communication facilitated by the Internet that support direct actions are, though important in their own right, not the focus of this chapter (Pickerill, 2001). The centre of discussion when analysing hacktivism is the meaning online direct action has for both popular politics in virtual spaces and for the nature of the Internet's infrastructure, both of which affect radical democracy.

To structure this discussion I will first turn to an exploration of the nature of hacktivism and this will form the bulk of this chapter. This will outline two main streams of hacktivism in mass action hacktivism and digitally correct hacktivism. Both these streams focus on taking direct action online. Following this I will make connections between these two types of hacktivism in the context of the alter-globalisation movement and hacking. This will allow a more complex and conflict-ridden view of hacktivism to emerge.

Following these two explorations, it will be possible to explore some questions this analysis of hacktivism poses to activism and radical democracy in the Internet age (Jordan, 2002; Tsagarousianou et al., 1998; Gibson et al., 2004). First, I will consider the general significance of hacktivism and what it might tell us about how radical democratic practices are formed in virtual spaces; issues such as bodies, masses and technological infrastructures will be discussed here. Finally, this discussion will be extended using

Laclau and Mouffe's notion of radical democracy. Laclau and Mouffe argue that capitalism constantly poses threats to social identities, each threat multiplying the points of political contestation in society. Radical democracy is key in providing sites through which equality and liberty can be generated and claimed by collective identities engaged in such political contests, thereby ensuring multiple foundations for resistance to multiple exploitations. The exploitations of capitalism thus ensure both tension and openness in society, as Laclau and Mouffe argue:

> This moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character, is what every project for radical democracy should set out to institutionalise.
>
> (1985, pp. 190–1)

The emergence of radical political practices in and of the Internet forms just such a moment in which the social is reworked, exposing its always-unfinished character. Hacktivism is part of the reconstruction of society as the effects of computer and networked technologies become ever more apparent. In hacktivism we will be able to trace some of the meanings for radical democracy of these technologies of the virtual.

Hacktivism

Hacktivism grew out of hacking. The hacking community had, for a long time, an implicit politics based around a shared rejection of any determination built into computer and network software and hardware and a belief in the value of secure access to free flows of information. Hackers have always opened and continue to open up and struggle with the nature of computer and network technologies, trying to ensure they understand both the limitations and abilities offered by such technologies, while also trying to ensure they are capable of altering any limitations. At the same time, hackers have implicitly, but only occasionally explicitly, subscribed to a belief that information should be freely available to all and that the Internet and computer are the greatest tools offered to humanity in ensuring open and secure access to information. This 'informational politics' has been wrapped in libertarian rhetoric, particularly by USA-based hackers, and in anarchist rhetoric, often by European-based hackers, but it is the concern for controlling and liberating information that unites hackers not their rhetorical strategies (Hafner & Markoff, 1993; Jordan, 2001). Yet this hacker politics has

most often been a lived or embodied politics, it resided in what hackers did, instead of being an articulated and theorised politics, it was rarely in what hackers said. Politics of this sort has only occasionally been directly discussed within hacking and often as a rhetorical afterthought (Levy, 1984, pp. 155–80; Mentor, 1986). Hacktivists loudly and proudly break with this folding of political matters into technical matters and they do so in two ways.

First, hacktivists, unlike many hackers, speak out on politics; they shout, proclaim, theorise and enunciate their politics. At the launch of the Windows remote administration and cracking tool Back Orifice, the hacking, at that point turning into hacktivist, group Cult of the Dead Cow (CDC) shouted 'Do it with a purpose!' (CDC, 1999). Media and cultural activist and theorist group Critical Arts Ensemble (CAE) called, in the mid-1990s, for the rise of politicised hacking; 'The new geography is a virtual geography, and the core of political and cultural resistance must assert itself in this electronic space' (CAE, 1994, p. 3).

The second transgression within the politics of hacking made by hacktivists has been their connection of hacking to a politics outside that of informational freedom. For example, an important trend within hacktivism emerged out of Zapatista support groups. This strand translated classic tactics of civil disobedience into electronic disobedience and embedded itself within the rising alter-globalisation movement. This connection to a loose, active and wide ranging movement inserts into hacking concerns hardly ever contemplated within the techno-fascinations of most hackers: anti-neo-liberalism, indigenous peoples rights, global trade agreements, autonomy and more. These two transgressions can be seen in the two key themes or trends within hacking: mass action and digital correctness.

Mass action hacktivism

Mass action hacktivism aims to slow down, and sometimes to stop, targeted sites on the Internet through many people simultaneously requesting so much data from a site that it cannot cope. Just as in street demonstrations or in sit-in civil disobedience, mass action hacktivism aims for a political intervention whose legitimacy is based on the numbers of people who participate. These actions are not like some other non-violent direct actions which are more symbolic, for example the Quaker-inspired tactic of 'bearing witness', and though related, because they draw their inspiration from the general repertoire of tactics that are called non-violent direct action, mass action has focused on legitimacy through bodies.

One example is the 20–22nd July 2005 action co-ordinated by the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT) against the 'Minutemen Project', an organisation opposed to immigration into the USA and particularly focused on creating greater barriers to migration across the USA–Mexico border. EDT organised a 'virtual sit-in', which they proclaimed a success based on 27,000 participants who managed over three days to, at times, close access to the following websites: The Border Patrol Website, The NAFTA Website, Samuel Huntington's Website and The California MinuteMen Site. This was the second such action, with the first claiming to have drawn 78,500 participants (Kartenberg, 2005). In general, such actions consist of the closing down or slowing down of a targeted site by means of many people attempting to simultaneously access that site thereby generating so much information that the targeted site cannot cope. The legitimacy of such actions is drawn from the number of participants who generate data.

A similar action was the Electrohippies' anti-World Trade Organisation (WTO) action timed to coincide with the now famous protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle. This action claimed 450,000 participants over 5 days and to have significantly slowed the WTO network, halting it on a number of occasions. This action asked protestors to log-on to one of two webpages which each then redirected the protestor's browser to automatically and constantly reload targeted pages on the computer network servicing the WTO meeting; one webpage constantly requested six pages, while the other requested three (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, pp. 74–5). The potent symbolism of this protest was that at a time when the alter-globalisation movement burst into worldwide public view by creating physical blockades on Seattle streets, these were matched by virtual blockades in the computer networks.

A few complexities in mass action hacktivism need to be noted. Mass action hacktivism does not solely produce attacks on websites, for example there have been e-mail campaigns and there are other ways of blocking the electronic veins of society. There is also a coincidence between mass action hacktivism and the alter-globalisation movement, which seems a historical rather than a logical association. There is nothing in the tactics used by mass action hacktivism which suggest it must necessarily be associated with any particular ethics except that of mass protest. Accordingly, any cause may find hacktivist repertoires of action useful. For example, mass action hacktivist actions have been run to protest against the death penalty in the USA (Tozzi & Verde, 2000). However, by far the vast majority of mass action hacktivist actions have been launched within the context of

the alter-globalisation movement, with aims such as supporting the Zapatista's, protesting WTO, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings and campaigning for open borders. This historical association is based on the emergence of hacktivism in the mid-1990s at the same time that the alter-globalisation movement was blossoming, but it should not hide the potential ethical flexibility of mass action hacktivism's tactics.

I have focused so far on the nature of the action undertaken, it is useful to also note that, like street demonstrations, there are a range of information and communication channels that support, publicise and help to organise any particular action. For example, the Electrohippies published a series of occasional papers outlining and analysing their own actions, various mail-lists and discussion fora are run by a range of hacktivists and it is common for any particular action to be announced in advance with an accompanying discussion. Hacktivists also take the time to publicise their actions to those outside the activist community, at a minimum using announcements on activist media outlets such as Indymedia but also using general press releases.

The general context for these activities that make up mass hacktivism was argued by the Electrohippies to be 'bringing community accountability to the Internet', thereby building, in a sense, radical democratic principles into their actions (Electrohippies, 2000). In a related way, Ricardo Dominguez from the EDT argued that electronic civil disobedience (ECD)

> should be judged by local, national and international courts as a civil act of disobedience and not as a crime. . . . EDT and the Electrohippies view their operations as acts of civil disobedience, analogous to street protests and physical sit-ins, not as acts of violence or terrorism. . . . ECD is not a secret and anonymous 'cracking' into servers and enslaving in order to set off Distributed Denial of Service-attacks (DDoS). These actions only represent one or two hidden people. ECD is the unbearable weight of human beings on-line in a civil and transparent protest – whose main goal is to question and spread information about what they feel is a social condition that must be corrected to create a better society for all. This act of transparency is important for civil society and the courts to understand – ECD is and should be treated as another digital condition intimately tied to the long and deep Western tradition of Civil Disobedience – nothing more and nothing less.
>
> (Dominguez in Kartenberg, 2005)

Dominguez's claims help us to summarise the way political and technological practices are formulated within mass action hacktivism. The key is Dominguez's contrast of ECD with the cracking of servers and his assertion that the ECD aims to reproduce the weight of bodies online to ensure a democratic edge to his actions. These two points are connected and they mark the way mass action hacktivism privileges its democratic politics over the efficient functioning of Internet technologies.

Dominguez's reference to cracking servers to launch DDoS attacks refers to the fact that if the object is to take down a particular website then it is much more efficient to launch a DDoS attack than a mass action. DDoS attacks can be launched by a single individual and work by infecting a range of computers with a programme which, on a signal, then all launch automated floods of data to a target computer. These floods can suddenly cause sites to disappear from the Internet and have worked on such major sites as Ebay.com and Amazon.com (Messmer & Pappalardo, 2001). There are also programmes to help automate such attacks, for example Stacheldracht or Trinoo (Hang, 2004). If the goal is to close a server because of the politics it supports then an automated DDoS attack in which packets of information are suddenly and massively generated by software would be far more effective than mass action techniques.

The reason why the more potent capabilities of Internet technologies are ignored resides in mass action's concern to assert the body in virtual space to ensure that their actions are legitimated by, in a sense, a radical democracy. This circles us back to the legitimacy of mass hacktivist actions because, for mass actions, numbers of bodies *are* legitimacy. If the only concern was success, defined as the taking down of a targeted site, then there would be no need for mass action. The need for bodies is the need to claim an action is legitimate because it is supported by many people, rather than being supported by data-generating software. The body needs to be reinserted into a realm where actions can be endlessly multiplied at the touch of a button so that the politics of the action may gain the legitimacy claimed by its proponents. Mass action hacktivism sets out on the paradoxical road of taking up deliberately impaired and imperfect technologies because such technologies serve its democratically inspired political aspirations.

The politics of mass action hacktivism is one in which the physical, or a convincing simulation of the physical, must be asserted on the Internet. To do this the tides of cyberspace must be resisted. This rejection of the Internet's multiplying powers is carried so far that some mass actions have included simply the request to type in a targeted website

address and then to sit at the computer clicking repeatedly on the reload button (Dominguez, 1998). Mass action hacktivism is, in a sense, an anti-virtual political action even though it only takes place in virtual spaces. The underlying political and radical democratic principle of the mass is here asserted within one of the least favourable political terrains it is possible to imagine, the virtual terrain where the physical must be simulated against norms of online life. Mass action hacktivism can be seen as engaging in radical democratic practices, as exemplified by its insistence in putting bodies, and thus the weight of a mass, back into online life. The next form of hacktivism has a contrasting approach, which seeks to build on virtual powers rather than limit them.

Digital correctness

At the same time that mass action hacktivism emerged a different style of hacktivism appeared, one more closely associated with the open source movement and with 'cracking' communities than with the alter-globalisation movement (Taylor, 1999). Here what might be seen as the traditional, if usually implicit, politics of hacking was made explicit. Rather than reinventing offline protest tactics, these more hacker hacktivists articulated a politics of information and set about implementing that politics with software. The politics that is articulated is not itself complex, the shift is more in the explicit focus on a particular politics rather than any sense in which a newly complex politics has been produced.

One of the clearest examples of such a politics was the Peekabooty project. This software development resulted from a group of hackers who coalesced around the long-time hacker group CDC. These hackers issued a manifesto called the Hacktivismo Declaration whose motto was 'assertions of liberty in support of an uncensored internet' and claimed they 'will implement technologies to challenge information rights violations' (Hacktivismo, 2001). Peekabooty was just such a technology. It sought to establish means by which information could securely cross national firewalls. The aim was to release a software package which many people could install creating a community-based Peekabooty network which would securely route requests for information, even when national governments tried to bar some information from crossing into their country (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, pp. 100–11). Unfortunately this attempt remained in early 2006 a project in progress.

Peekabooty demonstrates the key elements of digitally correct hacktivism in a politics of free, secure access to information on the Internet enacted through the production of software. The chief targets of this politics are national governments who attempt to censor the Internet

either by blocking access within national boundaries to certain sites or by surveilling people's traffic and arresting people on that basis. If we look beneath these points we see a number of important elements of which three are key.

First, the politics revolves around access to information as the general good, with access to information on the Internet being the particular politics of hacktivism. Such demands clearly support or help to construct radically democratic practices, but it is arguable whether radical democracy is their primary motive. The aim of access to information is itself two-fold, security for the person accessing information and access to any information. Security is often understood as anonymity, or at least anonymity is understood to be the easiest and best way to implement security. Where security also entails authorising information as coming from someone, in e-mails for example, then cryptography is often employed. Second, the means of pursuing the aim of secure access to information is to code software and then embed it in the fabric of the Internet. The aim is to determine an infrastructure to the Internet which facilitates secure access to information. If successful this strategy would technologically determine use of the Internet to be in line with hacktivist politics. Third, digitally correct politics often relies on community in two senses. On the one hand, a community of experts is needed to write and test software (even if one expert often takes a lead), a fact that can be seen in the credits to several hacktivist software tools. On the other hand, a more general community is often needed to implement the software tool effectively, seeding it widely across the Internet for use, for the anonymity that hopping across several servers may give or to create multiple places to read about or to download hacktivist tools.

The difficulties of Peekabooty, referred to by a Hacktivismo member as 'a mess', led to a concentration on several other projects; chiefly CameraShy and Six/Four, even as Peekabooty was (and is) doggedly pursued by some (Gross, 2002). If we look at these two further projects then we can see digitally correct hacktivism in full flow.

CameraShy automates a means of users hiding information within graphic files and then swapping them. This works through a programme which encodes information within a graphic file – which still appears as a graphic when viewed – that is then placed on a website. Those wishing to obtain the illicit information view the website, obtaining the graphic file and the information hidden within it, which the modified CameraShy browser automatically decodes. Each file produced this way is signed and has a password set up by the person who creates the file, this signature and password must be entered into the CameraShy browser

that the viewer uses. While the simple weakness remains that the signature and password must somehow be communicated by the creator to users, opening up the possibility of opponents finding it, the system provides a programme that is small and will run on the majority of computer systems worldwide (a 1.3 megabyte file that runs under Windows and requires MS Internet Explorer 6). CameraShy may not allow a general public to freely exchange information but for any groups who have access to the Internet and can securely exchange passwords CameraShy allows the evasion of censorship (Gross, 2002; CameraShy, 2006).

CameraShy embodies many things integral to digitally correct hacktivism. First, it facilitates a radical commitment to free speech. As critics have pointed out anything can be encrypted and passed, opening up illicit uses other than supporting human rights activists. That the main target is human rights is illustrated by the dedication integrated into CameraShy to Chinese human rights activist Wang Ruowang, yet this desire does not prevent free speech tools being utilised in any way seen fit by someone who obtains CameraShy. This is also a software tool, written by hacker The Pull and distributed in ways familiar to the open source movement (on sourceforge.net). CameraShy effectively allows its users to alter the fabric of the Internet by creating an alternate, hidden-in-full-view Internet that is seen only by those who go to the appropriate sites with the necessary passwords. Taken together these aspects underline that digitally correct hacktivists implement a politics with software.

Six/Four is named in memory of the Tiananmen Square massacre, which occurred on the Fourth of June 1989. As of early 2006[1] a developer's edition had been released, which represents an interim stage to a fully functioning system (Walton, 2003). Six/Four aims to be a protocol which enables peer-to-peer encrypted tunnelling. At its most optimistic the lead designer on Six/Four, the Mixter (2002), claims it will create

> anonymous, secure and decentralized tunnels for its users, in a transparent way, making any information and any service which is publicly available on the internet accessible to everyone. And this from everywhere, no matter if censorship, content filtering and/or surveillance systems are in place – while upholding the user's safety and privacy.

Six/Four aims to be a peer-to-peer network – meaning that all those using the network to download also provide some resources for uploading – providing secure, encrypted tunnels between peers. The network itself is

entered only through a number of 'trusted end-nodes' which are servers that have been authorised by Hacktivismo members and which act as the gateway between Six/Four computers and the public Internet. It is the trusted peer that provides public key encryption which double encrypts any data sought through it by someone using Six/Four. This, in theory, means any request made using Six/Four should subvert Internet censorship (Mixter, 2002; Rapoza, 2003).

Six/Four again demonstrates the elements of digitally correct hacking and its radical commitment to free information. First, the politics is that of secure access to information. The enemy is simply and clearly identified as any entity who seeks to censor, control or monitor individuals trafficking information on the Internet; this is usually national-governments but can be other entities such as corporations (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, 111–14). Second, this is an attempt to alter the infrastructure of the Internet. A successful Six/Four puts in place a network within the Internet that defeats censorship. Finally, Six/Four relies on two types of community in experts and participants. The experts revolve around the writing and running of Six/Four. The participants revolve around those who provide authorised trusted end-nodes and who provide parts of the peer-to-peer network, allowing both uploading and downloading within the Six/Four network.

Digitally correct hacktivism connects strongly with hacking and free software/open source as the communities it chiefly draws on to attract experts and participants. In turn, this form of hacktivism takes on several aspects of the hacking and free software/open source communities. For example, from the former it draws its informational politics and from the latter inspiration for software projects and things such as the Hacktivismo Enhanced-Source Software License Agreement (HESSLA), which attempts to ensure software issued under such a license remains both open source and focused on human rights. Digitally correct hacktivism campaigns for secure access to information through the reformation of the Internet's infrastructure and in that specific sense contributes to an element of radical democracy, in free and equal access to information. Yet, unlike mass action hacktivism which puts radical democratic principles at the core of its typical actions, digitally correct hacktivism's gaze is less on democracy itself than on what we might call one of radical democracy's key infrastructures.

Hacktivism: Two streams

Hacktivism is constituted by two contrasting streams of cyber-politics that engage with radical democracy in contrasting fashion. Mass action hacktivism focuses on political legitimacy based on masses of simulated

bodies by producing technologies with impaired or less than optimal functions and is most closely connected to communities that make up the alter-globalisation or global justice movement. Digitally correct hacktivism works from a political legitimacy based on the human right to freely and securely access information which it enacts through sophisticated interventions in the technological fabric of the Internet and is most closely connected to hacker, open source and human rights activist communities. Mass action hacktivism's commitment to legitimacy through a mass of bodies puts radical democracy at the centre of their aspirations, whereas digitally correct hacktivism's deep concern for free, secure access to all information focuses them away from directly radically democratic practices and towards the infrastructure of information. Unsurprisingly, such differences in emphasis lead to differences between the two streams of hacktivism.

Mass action hacktivists have caricatured digitally correct hacktivists as being more concerned with the rights of machines than the rights of humans. They have argued this in retaliation to hackers who attacked mass online actions as an abuse of the Internet because of the deliberate flooding of digital information. From this criticism some mass action hacktivists drew the conclusion that hackers were more concerned with bandwidth rights, the rights of digital information to move quickly, than they were with human rights to health, safety and self-determination (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, pp. 90–2). In the same context, mass actioners coined the mocking, though strikingly accurate, term 'digital correctness'. As we have seen these reactions misrepresent digital correctness, which is not concerned with the rights of machines but with the human right to free speech in the age of the Internet.

Digitally correct hacktivists have attacked mass actions both for the nature of their protest and for their poor informational politics. CDC members noted after the Electrohippies' Seattle protest that translating the tactics of embodied mass protest into those of disembodied online protest is a strange, if not contradictory, project: CDC noted the lack of mutual support generated in an online action compared to marching in the streets; they noted the lack of bystanders to influence in the online; and they noted the distinct difference in courage needed to press a button to participate in a mass protest rather than to stand in front of baton wielding police (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, pp. 167–8). Alongside criticisms of the form of mass online protest, a more specific political objection has been made that mass actions are contrary to free speech and to the free flows of information that the digitally correct see as a human right. As with mass action's criticisms of digital correctness, these analyses

have some force but also, to an extent, misunderstand mass actions. Mass action hacktivists are well aware of the limitations of online mass actions but also realise they have advantages in extending participation in protests beyond local geography and in providing extensive information that explores and justifies a protest.

These differences emphasise the contrast between the political styles and democratic ethics of digitally correct and mass action hacktivists. However it is not unusual for protest groups or social movements to be internally varied, and noting these divisions is more a way of emphasising the complex nature of hacktivism than it is a refutation of the categorisation of hacktivism that has been offered here (Melucci, 1996).

Hacktivism and radical democratic political practice

Having explored the nature of political practices among hacktivists we can turn now to some reflection on how they relate to issues of radical democracy. A first issue concerns whether online forms of political activity are distinct because they are online.

Mass action hacktivism's difficulties in mimicking offline political forms in online actions suggest that online actions are different, which in turn suggests these differences need to be taken into account. Online mass actions seek to reproduce an offline form of politics but in doing so must work against the grain of the Internet by both refusing powers the Internet offers – in this case to multiply actions with software – and by struggling to reinstate elements necessary to claim a reproduction of offline techniques – mass actions struggle to reproduce the body in online actions. Similarly digital correctness seems to offer a familiar politics, they have an ethics based on human rights which animates their actions, but their form of politics is to directly interfere in the material infrastructure of the online world, implementing their politics in a way that most direct action activists can only dream about. This point should be emphasised because it addresses issues of the infrastructure of the Internet. A successful digital correctness action alters the nature of the online world, whereas there are almost no actions offline activists can take which immediately and in a lasting fashion alter the nature of the offline world. For example, no radical direct action against roads can hope to implement a redirection of roads – the elimination of a road for example – only the accumulation of long political struggle can hope to stop or alter road building programmes even then leaving in place roads already built. In contrast, digitally correct hacktivist actions can immediately implement changes in Internet

infrastructures that enable their political vision, with the clearest example being subversions of national firewalls. Difficulties here have so far centred on problems in assembling the necessary expertise to code a project, as can be seen in Peekabooty's faltering progress and what appears to be limited evolution of Six/Four since the 2003 release of its developer's edition.

Care must be taken when examining political practices native to the Internet because though such practices may seem similar, even the same, as offline political practices they are in subtle ways different. Hacktivism shows the situation is complex as it affirms that political practices developed outside of the Internet, civil disobedience sit-ins for example, can be imported into the Internet, in this way affirming a close relationship between online and offline. At the same time, such importations produce significant differences between political practices, which affirms online and offline as distinct social and cultural realms. The analysis of radical democracy in the context of radical online action produces complexities which must be untangled with sensitivity to online and offline political factors and which cannot presume that either realm is free of or is controlled by the other. This interrelationality is the first conclusion this analysis suggests.

This exploration of hacktivism has focused on political practices to be able to see in the details of political action the nature of hacktivism. Such details have come at the cost of time spent detailing a theory of radical democracy which could be related to online political practices. I have tried, where appropriate, to indicate such connections, in particular drawing on the differing conceptions of the body and effective use of technology utilised by mass action and digitally correct hacktivists. Yet, despite this lack of an extended theorisation of radical democracy, it seems clear we can conclude that hacktivism both enriches and relates to radical democracy. Without claiming to have given radical democratic theory its due, it is worth extending these conclusions about hacktivism more explicitly in relation to radical democracy thereby opening up relations between hacktivist political practices and radical democratic theory. Laclau and Mouffe briefly sum up their radical democratic theory in a way that provides a useful point for reflection.

> If everything then depends on the extension and deepening of the democratic revolution, we should ask what the latter itself depends on and what it ultimately consists of. . . . the radical instability and threat to social identities posed by capitalist expansion necessarily leads to new forms of collective imaginary which reconstruct those

> threatened identities in a fundamentally new way. Our thesis is that egalitarian discourses and discourses on rights play a fundamental role in the reconstruction of collective identities.
>
> (1990, pp. 127–8)

Hacktivism both participates in and somewhat contradicts a view like Laclau and Mouffe's, in which radical democracy is conceived of as the process by which equality and liberty is extended in relation to social identities destabilised by capitalism.

Hacktivism addresses new social identities that emerge with the extension of use of the Internet. Hacktivism addresses such identities with radical democratic messages both of the need to use the Internet to create greater equality and liberty throughout all human societies and of the need to ensure that the democratic powers of the Internet itself are not curtailed. Hacktivism participates in the long struggle over democracy under capitalism in constructing new political practices that, on the one hand, create new forms of popular protest and, on the other hand, create and defend new means of securely accessing information. What are, perhaps, not so clear are the contradictory tendencies towards democratisation within hacktivism. These tendencies split between mass action and digital correctness.

First, in a repetition of a longstanding complexity resulting from the interaction of democratisation and radical political practice, mass action hacktivism's main political practice can be seen as anti-free speech because it focuses on silencing an opponent's access to the Internet. Certainly digitally correct hacktivists accuse mass action of this abrogation of free speech (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, pp. 167–70). Complexity is inherent here as mass action hacktivists, and most advocates of civil disobedience actions, would argue that the temporary abrogation of some powerful or exploitative institution's rights is hardly a contradiction of democratisation, it may rather be seen as an extension of radical democracy. Yet the fact remains that if freedom of information is a battleground for radical democracy, then at points mass action hacktivism denies to some the right to such a freedom.

Second, digital correctness' commitment to protecting and developing the infrastructure of the Internet simultaneously commits it to reliance on experts. The defining political practices of digital correctness involve writing software programmes, which can be embedded into the Internet to promote freedom of information flows. This means that all those relying on digital correctness' interventions, for example a human rights activist passing illicit information by using the Six/Four

programme, are in turn relying on the expertise digitally correct hacktivists have assembled. Though the tools produce democratisation, the tools themselves are produced through necessarily expertise-defined elites. Again this may or may not seem a significant complexity, after all many activists use word processors without worrying which corporation (or free software/open source community) created them. It is hard to judge how significant a contradiction this is to radical democracy but it is worth recognising that digital correctness' tools come at a price including reliance on software coding expertise.

These points about radical democracy and hacktivism open up complexities that cannot be fully explored here. We should also not overemphasise these contradictions to democratisation when it is clear that much of hacktivist political practice participates in the process of radical democracy that Laclau and Mouffe identify.

Radical democracy and radical politics are being reformulated in informational times. In hacktivism we see novel political tactics, even when such tactics are inspired by familiar political actions, and we see entirely new political opportunities being opened up in attempts to implement technical infrastructures imbued with a radical edge. Hacktivism is not only a significant political innovation in its own right, it also allows us to see at the centre of information societies' radical political practices and radical democracy.

Note

1. It should be noted that Six/Four developer's edition was released in 2003 but by early 2006 there were no other clear signs of further development.

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6

Between Agonistic and Deliberative Politics: Towards a Radical E-Democracy

Joss Hands

Introduction

In an age in which computer-mediated communication (CMC) is becoming ever more central to both public and personal life, the problem of how we 'do' democracy online is the most urgent of concerns. This is a particular dilemma in light of the vast, chaotic and extreme complexity of the Internet. While this dilemma of doing democracy has been debated widely, the possibility for a *radical e-democracy,* which coordinates the dense and multifarious spaces of interaction that form the everyday fabric of our political lives and that challenges existing structures of power and control, has been comparatively neglected. Addressing the nature and possibilities of a radical e-democracy entails at least two important questions, both of which will inform the direction of this chapter. Firstly, what are the qualities of an e-democracy that can truly stand as radical? Secondly, how should these qualities inform our approach to understanding, organising and advocating online politics?

In order to begin answering these questions it is necessary to draw on political theory. I will, in that spirit, begin by exploring two of the most widely developed democratic theories that are commonly understood as radical: agonistic pluralism and deliberative democracy.

Agonistic pluralism

The term 'radical' in the domain of democratic political theory has been most successfully adopted by the conception of 'Radical Democracy' as outlined initially by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1984). The logical place to begin thinking

about a radical e-democracy is with this conception. Democratic politics cannot, nor could it ever, they claim, produce the kind of coherent and unified polity and society that is reconcilable with the liberal ontology dominant throughout the Enlightenment. Politics is, per se, conflictual, and thus a vision of liberal democracy that is predicated on the possibility of general consensus will inevitably fail.

Chantal Mouffe's work subsequent to the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is of particular interest here. Mouffe follows Carl Schmitt in arguing that liberalism misconceives the nature of political community and identity, which in fact can only be realised in a specific kind of relationship of self to other, as Schmitt argues '[t]he specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy' (Schmitt, 1996, p. 26). This indicates the domain of politics as distinct from morality, in that the thing that bounds 'us' together as a political entity is necessarily immanent and oppositional, and as such cannot appeal to a transcendent morality as a legitimating principle. For Mouffe, John Rawls typifies this kind of belief. She conceives his approach as not political at all: 'What Rawls presents as political philosophy is simply a specific type of moral philosophy' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 56). She highlights Rawls's 'neglect of the role played by conflict, power and interest' (p. 50), which she sees as symptomatic of more general conflation of 'political discourse with moral discourse' (p. 55). Thus it is claimed that 'we need a democratic model able to grasp the nature of the political. This requires an approach, which places the question of power and antagonism at its very center [sic]' (Mouffe, 2000, p.13). However, she does not want to simply reproduce right-wing political theory but, as she claims, to 'think with Schmitt, against Schmitt' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 2). As such the task is to retain the contestation and conflict of the political while extricating the violent and oppressive. To this end she introduces the concept of agonism, in which the *we* and the *they* 'recognise the legitimacy of their opponents' and recognise they are '"adversaries" not enemies' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20). The advantage of the addition of a category of adversary between friend and enemy is the recognition of contestation without conflict. The adversary Mouffe suggests is 'somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put in question' (Mouffe, 2000, p.15). Mouffe therefore advocates an *agonistic pluralism* whose primary objective is the formation of a hegemony of the forces of the left. A gathering of friends, so to speak, who while defined by agonistic relations are in opposition not to enemies, but adversaries. Agonistic pluralism's radicalness thus lies in its aim to recognise difference and to ascribe rights, to reach out

to as many 'friends' as possible, while retaining the necessary contestation and sheer struggle of politics.

The understanding of how such an approach may be relevant to theorising politics online brings us back to the nature of the Internet as a huge, sprawling environment interlaced with a heterogeneous range of practices, texts and virtual objects. We can think of the Internet in a way that parallels the social: 'To believe that a final resolution of conflicts is eventually possible . . . far from providing the necessary horizon for the democratic project, is to put it at risk' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. xvii). The need then is to articulate a range of struggles in a hegemonic movement. It is without much controversy that a claim that the capacity of the Internet to lend itself to 'expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression' (p. 176) can be made. The Internet's capacities of linkage and horizontal organisation mean it can augment the construction of networks of such movements and activist organisations with ease. The hyper-linking of websites, for example, opens up ample opportunity to find new associations and expanded discourses that would otherwise remain isolated. The recognition and articulation of such matrices of struggle mean a hegemonic strategy is seemingly well suited to the online environment, and that thinking about the Internet in a political way lends itself readily to the approach of agonistic pluralism.

Significant to this hegemonic strategy is maintaining the autonomy of multiple struggles, in which no one element is given priority, but all are directed towards 'the autonomization of the spheres of struggle and the multiplication of political spaces' (p. 178). The Internet, again, would seem to offer an ideal tool for pursuing such a strategy. The undoubted character of the Internet as an open, many-to-many, multifarious, cheap and efficient network means it is well placed to foreground autonomous struggles without any one being subsumed by the others.

Given the commitment to hegemony and autonomy it is not surprising that one of the political forms favoured by agonistic pluralism is the new social movement, which has been extremely effective in provoking antagonism and creating change. Many of the associated subjectivities and discourses that new social movements have enfranchised have traditionally been excluded from, indeed repressed by, older class-based politics. The Internet, in augmenting the balance of hegemony and autonomy, offers agonistic pluralism the capacity to further 'an extension of the democratic revolution to a whole new series of social relations' (p. 159). As such, the Internet presents the chance to expand the

range of social movements while maximising their autonomy, and therefore they must be a vital component in any radical e-democracy.

A further area of significance in any theory of radical e-democracy is the inclusion of economic justice. This has specific relevance to the Internet in terms of what had come to be referred to as the digital divide. Specifically a radical e-democracy must include the whole demos in democratic steering, in both material and educational terms. Agonistic pluralism includes aspirations for economic justice that is significant for this debate. One of Laclau and Mouffe's suggestions is 'participation by all subjects in decisions about what is to be produced' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 178). In that sense it is a truly radical theory in that it is talking about more than just redistribution and opportunity, but the democratisation of the workplace, and the taking command of decisions regarding the distribution of goods and services. Such substantive elements are highly relevant to the digital economy. Such a discourse may allow for the generation of resistance to capital's exploitation of immaterial labour. Similarly it can contribute to understanding the opening up of technology for the construction of resistant identities, of new kinds of community and the designation of the oppressive nature of cyberspace as a domain of colonisation by capital. In terms of resisting exploitation, and promoting economic as well as political democracy, its potential to be a truly radical approach seems promising.

In order to critically examine the radical potential outlined above it is helpful to summarise the advantages of an agonistic pluralism in theorising a radical e-democracy into four main areas: (1) a way of understanding and guiding our thought in the struggle for a radical democratic practice on and through the Net – a hegemonic strategy; (2) recognising the value of the autonomy of online struggles and discourses while resisting domination and oppression, and thus the importance of agonism therein; (3) the appeal to and inclusion of certain social movements to the nexus of radical politics previously disregarded by older discourses and (4) the possibility of including a substantive agenda of economic justice.

While agonistic pluralism does therefore appear to contribute useful tools towards a radical e-democracy there are substantial concerns. Firstly, with regard to hegemonic strategy, agonistic pluralism does offer the advantage of providing the tools to theorise the Internet as a truly contested domain, in which power is ubiquitous and democracy is a struggle to be realised. However, when it comes to providing a legitimating logic that could underpin democracy as a force of resistance to

power, deeply embedded flaws in the agonistic approach become apparent. There is an overarching problem, namely that Mouffe objects to the very idea of moral[1] discourse entering into the political arena. In her view, political philosophy should not function in this area, such a discourse being tainted by a universalism she cannot abide. Rather, 'its subject matter is the ethics of the political, which should be distinguished from morality' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 56). The dangers of separating politics, law and morality, aside from being counterfactual to the way in which such discourses are actually employed, leaves us in a position precisely in which the political is the domain of power alone, a view Mouffe advocates. However, unlike Schmitt, Mouffe believes that it is possible to construct a we/they relation in the political realm that does not equal friend/enemy, nor implies an external moral domain. This is the conceptual *sine qua non* of Mouffe's position, and it is one that is unsustainable. The only possible justification for recognising the right of an 'enemy' to become an 'adversary' is reciprocity, which is a moral principle. Without such a principle, leading to binding norms, any move to the recognition of the 'them' can only be based on the arbitrary desire to do so. The idea of 'rights' in this context is meaningless. She justifies this with a secondary argument, claiming that not to separate morality and politics is to be left with two unacceptable options, to 'foreclose the possibility of a pluralist democratic order' or 'postulate a completely inadequate, anti-political view of liberal democracy' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 19). However, the latter claim assumes that a liberal-democratic approach precludes the possibility of contestation and difference. This is fundamentally flawed because it discounts the possibility of a deliberative approach open to contestation and pluralism, and if the latter claim fails then the former is also negated, a position I shall argue for below.

Beyond this, if we accept the definition of politics as a hegemonic articulation of struggles, then the only way to enshrine hegemony is via exclusion of some struggles and inclusion of others; thus the rule of politics must submit struggle to a process of judgement. The basis of such judgement as necessarily immanent renders it ultimately arbitrary. In that sense there is no escaping Schmitt for Mouffe. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the consequences of this in theorising the Internet are clear; while such an approach has much to offer in reflecting what we see online it cannot provide the grounds for a normative set of rules for steering e-democracy that could be anything other than partial. This fails to provide a ground for a properly functioning radical democratic approach, at least one that takes equality and universal

rights seriously. To that end a radical e-democracy requires a moral dimension to ensure it does not collapse into a de-facto struggle for domination.

The second advantage I posited was the recognition of the value of autonomous struggles, rooted in the 'pluralistic' element of agonistic pluralism. However, the value of autonomous elements in providing a nurturing environment for pluralism will only work in the context of agonism as Mouffe defines it, where the right of the adversary to exist is recognised. It is through recognition that agonism is protected from collapsing into antagonism. However, as I have suggested, the border between agonistic and antagonistic relationships is a deeply problematic one. Mouffe is in effect advocating an attitude of reciprocity with the adversary, thus taking a moral, not an ethical, stance. Her solution is to rely on the discourse she dismisses. The result is that as long as she insists on the fundamental us/them binary the problem is only shifted to one remove and remains unresolved. In such a schema we will always reach the end of accommodation at some point and be confronted by the antagonistic 'struggle between enemies' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 16). Either this or admit to the endless extension of agonism, which then begs the question of where the distinction between agonism and reciprocity could ever be made. Thus agonism appears as an equivocal concept floating between antagonism and reciprocity, able to satisfy the demands of neither. In that regard it seems the acceptance of the principle of reciprocity is the only option that avoids conceding the point to Schmitt.

The third point I raised was the importance of agonistic pluralism in encouraging struggles outside of the traditional left, specifically social movements. This clearly chimes with the profound significance of the Internet for such movements in terms of coordination, publicity and advocacy. The possibility for an articulation of struggles here suggests that it would be short-sighted to ignore the values that agonistic pluralism supports. However, the formation of movements into the famed 'movement of movements' poses a profound problem for an agonistic perspective. Namely, what is it that brings disparate social movements together? Given the obvious answer of a range of shared themes around which they can rally, even if they are in the end empty signifiers, there is still a unifying discourse under the sign of which all struggles must coalesce. Why, in this instance, should agonism be a preferable or more useful way to understand this than, say, deliberative consensus? On a normative level the agonistic view is reliant on either contingent immanent elements or moral norms that are external to the struggles

themselves. Therefore for such struggles to cohere into a hegemonic force in these terms relies on power, and as such returns us to the failings discussed above with regard to hegemony, agonism and autonomy. The challenge is to provide a perspective that can account for a coordination of struggles online, without falling back into the contingencies of agonism, but while recognising the values of plurality and radical difference.

Finally the commitment of agonistic pluralism to economic justice. In the context of adhering to the question of how to maximise the involvement of the demos it is right for a radical democratic theory to include this in its domain. However, the obvious problem here is agonistic pluralism's status as a post-*Marxist* theory. Given the commitment to politics as a free-floating domain independent of economics and 'freed' from the 'perspective of the Enlightenment' (Mouffe, 1993, p.11) the decoupling of economics from politics means that 'the articulation between socialism and democracy, far from being an axiom, is a political project; that is it is the result of a long and complex hegemonic construction' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1998, p. 62). Thus the drive to agonism in the political arena cannot be applied directly to economic justice, given its submission to political power. Rather the aim is, as both Laclau and Mouffe suggest, hegemonic inclusion of a discourse of economic justice. While socialism may be a desire of agonistic pluralism it is not entailed or prefigured by it. Thus the agonistic principle is readily recuperated by market logic, indeed absorbed by the neo-liberal hegemony. A radical democratic theory of the Internet, which takes seriously the need to include the whole demos in its processes, needs economic justice as a necessary predicate.

I have identified four areas where agonistic pluralism contributes towards theorising a radical e-democracy. While this approach opens up attractive possibilities, and maps a terrain for thinking about this agenda, I have also offered a range of critical arguments that limit its potential in reflecting and mobilising the Internet for truly radically democratic ends. As such I will now address a range of perspectives from an alternative democratic theory, deliberative democracy, which I believe can work towards overcoming the flaws described above.

Deliberative democracy

As a democratic theory that is predicated on a discourse ethical perspective, woven out of the principle of reciprocity, deliberative democracy attempts to anchor moral principles in the nature of discourse

itself. This makes it an attractive prospect in any theory of radical e-democracy as it enshrines imperatives to justice, openness, recognition and autonomy as fundamental norms of all interaction.

At the heart of this approach is a communicative principle, developed by Jürgen Habermas, which recognises the rational character of moral arguments. 'The mutual attribution of a capacity for moral judgement which we observe in everyday life calls for a kind of explanation that does not flatly deny the reasonable character of moral arguments' (Habermas, 2002, p. 79). Habermas makes the point purposely that clarity in this matter is unequivocal, and thus the distinction between the ethical and the moral needs to be made emphatically and defended as such. It is through law, and the legitimation process therein, that such orientations are made manifest – while the legal system is not, by any means, an exclusively moral procedure, it is in Habermas's discourse theory of law at least, a parallel and at times interlacing process: 'Reasons that are convenient for the legitimation of law must, on pain of cognitive dissonance, harmonise with the moral principles of universal justice and solidarity' (Habermas, 1996, p. 99). By very definition the process of law-making is the domain of the political, and it is the end process of broad democratic deliberation and thus its legitimate expression of political will. This is a view shared more widely by others. Thus Dennis Thompson and Amy Gutmann claim that one should 'reject – and not just provisionally – any theory that denies the need for moral justification, and therefore any theory that bases politics only on power' (Gutmann & Thompson, 2003, p. 45). It is for these reasons that deliberative democracy may be able to fill the gaps agonistic pluralism leaves, and contribute to a normative theory to legitimise radical democracy online. I will now return, in order to develop this possibility, to the four areas of concern identified above.

Hegemony/Pluralism

Is there an approach that can proffer a coordination of struggles, without the problems associated with a hegemonic framework, but that does not eliminate pluralism in the way Mouffe ascribes to a rationalist liberalism? If we want to follow a deliberative approach one of the problems to be overcome, from an agonistic perspective, is deliberative democracy's support of universalising principle of discourse ethics. The specific complaint being that the orientation towards consensus renders certain forms of difference illegitimate, and so the theory is incompatible with pluralism in a fundamental way. The answer is that in fact deliberative democrats are also keen to maintain pluralism, but based

on a distinct understanding of discourse. Even Habermas (1996), in his two-track model of democracy, concedes that consensus is not a realistic outcome of deliberation in modern plural societies. It is true that the two-track model tries to accommodate compromise in order to facilitate decision-making at the level of governance, but this is a pragmatic necessity in any system, even one based in agonistic pluralism. Thus a deliberative approach does not repress, deny or invalidate contestation but rather attempts to accommodate it. There are theorists, such as John Dryzek (2005) who go further to make a compelling case for deliberative democracy as a powerful tool in managing deeply divided societies. Thus Dryzek suggests Mouffe conceives deliberation 'in the image of a philosophy seminar' (Dryzek, 2005, p. 221), while in fact deliberation can be 'more contestatory than this image, so more robust in the face of deep difference' (p. 221). The combination of contestation and deliberation is indeed the essence of argument, and to that extent we can see the role of the Internet, its hyperlinks and attendant discursive exegesis, as here providing a kind of grammar of exchange. Just as within the theory of communicative action all communication is predicated on comprehensibility and a range of attendant validity claims, so online the codes of Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) provide the background of a communicative grammar that supports cooperation and contestation. The hyper-linking of websites, the cross-posting of mailing lists, the conversations and conflicts in the 'blogsphere', and all the attendant exchanges of validity between various networks and fora, organise the structure of inter-subjective and inter-community association online in a way which supports cooperation and affinity without hegemony. This does not negate contestation but enriches it; even where there is non-deliberative disagreement the links remain, even where consensus is unattainable. Rather than seeking a hegemonic approach to action on and through the Internet, a strategy of open communication, which coordinates sets of shared interests, offers a more fruitful option, one which I will explore in the final section of this chapter.

Autonomy/Agonism

While agonistic politics recognises the value of autonomy of struggles, and suggests a useful approach to capturing the Internet's fragmented structure, it has trouble in translating this into a set of norms that would legitimate the recognition of others in a non-contingent way. Some versions of deliberative democracy offer concepts that can overcome this difficulty. Amy Gutmann and Denis Thompson (1996)

describe a state of affairs they describe as *deliberative disagreement*. This condition describes a situation where two competing positions both have sound reasons that could rightly be accepted, but which opposing parties are not prepared to accept, or which they see as incompatible. This situation is close to Mouffe's understanding of agonism, and is acceptable within a deliberative framework where the principle of reciprocity leads to a, to put it crudely, agreement to disagree, given certain conditions that Gutmann and Thompson describe as moral accommodation, part of which is 'civic magnanimity' (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, p. 82). A condition in which parties 'acknowledge the moral status of the positions they oppose' (ibid.). Thus plurality is maintained while recognition respected, reflecting the condition of agonism, while maintaining the moral framework agonism denies. Similarly the condition of antagonism can be more readily accommodated in a deliberative democratic theory, as what Gutmann and Thompson refer to as non-deliberative disagreement. While they have little to say about this there are other thinkers within a deliberative democratic tradition who offer alternatives to the impasse of antagonism. For example, the concept of deliberative activism developed by Archon Fung (2005). Fung argues that in situations where deliberation is taking place in conditions of distorting inequality, or where it is restricted, excluded from political consideration, or there is a total failure of recognition, there is no imperative to limit action to persuasion only. He argues that 'widespread inequality and failures of reciprocity can justify nonpersuasive, even coercive, methods for the sake of deliberative goals' (Fung, 2005, p. 399). The combination of deliberative disagreement and deliberative activism provide the conceptual tools to fulfil the advantages that agonism offers, but do so without the cost of an absence of moral recognition.

Social movements

The capacity to draw in new social movements to its struggles marks out agonistic pluralism's progress from an exclusionary Marxist class-based struggle. However it does not mark it out from a deliberative democratic perspective. While agonistic pluralism suffers with the problem of contingency in confronting power deliberative democracy does not. The arguments of John Dryzek, of Gutmann and Thompson and Archon Fung have much relevance here. For example, the reasons given supporting democratic struggles, including those that have a significant online presence, are often precisely those of democratic recognition appealing to universalisable norms. In the case of one of the

most famous groups, whose struggle has been widely disseminated and coordinated via a global informational dimension, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN; Zapatista Army of National Liberation), there is a specific appeal to universal human rights and to a coherent and all embracing civil society that struggles 'for human values of democracy, liberty and justice'. To include 'individuals, groups, collectives, movements, social, civic, and political organisations, neighbourhood associations, cooperatives . . .' (Zapatistas, 1998, p. 14). While this kind of activity has been perceived by some established powers, here the RAND Corporation, as a kind of 'social netwar' (Olesen, 2005, p. 14), in fact the goal of integrating and expanding the spaces for struggle is done on the basis of a deliberative ideal. The aim is thus to construct, out of challenging circumstances, the space for deliberation via engaging power according to a 'moral calculus of civil disobedience' (Fung, 2005, p. 402).

This is not to move towards a unified and dictatorial opposition or vanguard party, but to open opportunities for social movements to recognise shared interests and affinities, and for such movements to coordinate discourses and act together, or indeed to act apart, or in any number of constellations. To recognise an overarching moral discourse of recognition is not to repress pluralism, nor to abandon politics. It is to recognise the actually existing shape of political struggle, just as with the global justice movement.

Economic justice

A deliberative approach offers the advantage over an agonistic one that it can offer arguments for social justice based on, and entailed by, the principle of reciprocity. Gutmann and Thompson (1996, 2003) as well as, among others, Joshua Cohen (1996) argue that deliberative democracy need not, indeed should not, be restricted to a pure proceduralism. Rather, that by its very nature political deliberation entails substantive elements. Gutmann and Thompson claim that reciprocity demands that individuals concerned provide reasons that mutually justify binding laws. These, in turn, must contain a substantive element, because certain substantive opportunities could not be reasonably denied to any participant in the deliberative process without undermining the principle of reciprocity. For example, 'denying some person's suffrage is a procedural deprivation that is inconsistent with reciprocity' (Gutmann & Thompson, 2003, p. 34). The same can be said for health care or education. Ultimately 'the foundation of reciprocity is the capacity to seek fair terms of social cooperation for their own sake' (Gutmann &

Thompson, 1996, p. 52). Fair terms must entail a range of, what Gutmann and Thompson define as, basic opportunities. The argument proceeds to the justification of the claim that 'one's life chances should not be determined by factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view' (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, p. 209). The base line of which they define as the basic opportunity principle, which dictates citizens have access to 'the resources they need to live a decent life and enjoy other (non-basic) opportunities in our society' (p. 217). The precise levels of such opportunity would itself be subject to deliberation, but needless to say the capacity for all who will be affected by the outcome of such deliberation must have the opportunity to participate. In practice I would argue for the standards of basic opportunity to be set at a far higher level than Gutmann and Thompson do, for example they do not feel the need to extend deliberation to the work place or the economy as a sub-system, which I believe is necessary. However, the principle itself is sufficient to establish a substantive element to deliberative democracy, which should then be expanded to include the economy.

Adopting such a principle would entail access to information as one such basic opportunity. I therefore claim that decisions regarding the steering of the structure, distribution and democratic function of the Internet should be party to these principles. The divisions and inequalities in the distribution of liberties and opportunities suggest more than simply a need to provide universal access to the Internet, though of course they include that, but need to address all areas of the 'digital divide'. Jan Van Dijk argues that these include access to temporal, mental, social and cultural resources (2006, p. 178). Thus the distribution of opportunities to participate in such a socially, economically and politically central system becomes a moral imperative. This is, of course, not an isolated imperative but places demands on the whole social system to provide access to such resources that go way beyond the Internet itself. This includes orienting the Internet towards, or guaranteeing by legislation if necessary, the nurturing of an online environment conducive to the conditions of a truly radical e-democracy.

I have now revisited the four core areas that inform the approach I have advocated. Using a range of ideas from the tradition of deliberative democracy I have attempted to overcome the flaws in the agnostic approach, while recognising the value of the terrain it maps. I can now go some way to answering the first question I posited, specifically, what are the qualities of a theory of e-democracy that can truly stand as radical? (1) Not hegemony, but coordination of interests via open communication. (2) Not agonism, but deliberative agreement/disagreement

underpinned by reciprocity. (3) Not an articulation of social movements, but free association and affiliation. (4) Non-proprietary interaction and guaranteed universal education and access to CMCs. In this way participation is maximised and power confronted by discursive autonomy and cooperation.

However, the second question remains: how should these imperatives inform our approach to understanding, organising and advocating online politics? To begin such a task a framework is needed that both recognises the underlying reality of democratic activity online and can contribute to the realisation of the normative claims outlined above.

Towards the moral steering of radical e-democracy

The political structure that is most readily available to address the demands of understanding, organisation and advocacy is that of the public sphere. The concept of a pubic arena of deliberation and opinion formation is intended to both describe an actually existing history of democracy, alongside the prescription of an ideal type of democratic procedure. The strength and weaknesses of this model have been extensively debated, in both offline and online contexts, and I could not hope to give these debates justice here. I can therefore only offer a brief proposition as to why I think the model does not offer a satisfactory approach in this context, before finishing with a somewhat speculative proposal, which I hope may offer a starting point for further thought.

The model of the public sphere, as developed by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1960s, relates to a social reality that is now fundamentally altered. Manuel Castells identifies our society as a network society, with the network being 'the new social morphology' (Castells, 1996, p. 469). As our society's most fundamental network infrastructure it is therefore tautological, but necessary, to say that we need to think about the Internet in this context. While public sphere theories have been adapted to account for a mediated society, in order to capture the new social dynamics in which the idea of singular 'public' is not credible, the concept has to be taken so far from its original context that in order to be relevant there is a danger of it being overburdened with conflicting sediments of meaning, and becoming an empty signifier. There is an associated danger of it turning into a source of argumentation about esoteric detail, rather than a helpful tool in addressing the core issues at stake. Secondly, while the normative aspect of the public sphere is closely related to the discourse ethics discussed above, it is applied to a form of democratic legitimacy too closely associated to the aggregative

consumer democracy of both the welfare state compromise and neoliberalism. This democratic form is now so fundamentally compromised and colonised by the interests of capital that it is difficult to see it offering any real possibility for hope. Therefore it is better to adapt the normative elements, as producing the imperatives proposed above, and apply them to a formula more appropriate to a network society, without a collapse into agonistic pluralism. In that regard the question to be addressed is how to theorise a publicness without a public?

It is in this spirit that I propose a speculative idea, the concept of the quasi-autonomous discourse network. The concept of such a network contains both a descriptive and normative element. Descriptively the autonomous aspect relates to a network form in which the structure is defined by the communication of shared values, interests and validity claims among the sets of actors that constitute its nodes. In short, a network is organised around the shared discourses of its actors. The quasi element describes the fact that such networks have no discrete edges, but are porous shifting sets which also contain intersecting and cross-cutting elements of other discourses. As such, the gravity of the network is the shared validity claims that all would redeem. Thus, for example, a quasi-autonomous discourse network that was organised around a range of anti-imperialist positions would identify a large coalition. Whereas, if posited alongside a commitment to democratic control of the economy, another discourse would be employed, perhaps shrinking that network. While it may be the case that certain individuals are committed to one discourse but not the other, this would describe the boundaries of that network for those persons. Yet it would not preclude them from acting within the former network, to the extent that it did not undermine their position in engaging with the latter. In that regard, an individual could be a member of any number of interlocking and/or concentric discourse networks. The networks to which they are committed are then, in a sense, constructed out of their own perspective, but not limited to that perspective; the network is defined by the overlapping and shared discourses as a whole.

The interplay between such networks may be weaker or stronger, depending on context, and as the range of redeemed propositions is narrowed, the extent of agreement will also narrow, but the interlocking and overlapping discourses continue to speak to each other. This is a fully political concept, as the overlapping of quasi-autonomous discourse networks will never encompass the whole system, necessarily recognising the irreconcilability of some positions and discourses. For

example the huge set of persons and organisations opposed to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were able to mobilise an enormous global network against the government of the 'coalition of the willing'. The importance of the Internet in forging the huge and extremely plural anti-war marches on 15 February 2003 and numerous direct actions and campaigns beyond, which I have discussed in greater length elsewhere, cannot be underestimated (Hands, 2006). The fact that quasi-autonomous discourse networks can be potentially huge and loose, or relatively small and tight, is in fact a positive reflection of the advantages the Internet offers in overcoming the scalability problems of democracy. Because the networks are not oriented towards a collective public, but rather a multitude of interweaving sets, the size of a network does not devalue individual voices through extension or become invisible through limitation.

On the normative level the concept of a quasi-autonomous discourse network generates moral steering in two ways. Firstly, through the overarching validity claim of reciprocal recognition generated by all participants in communicative interaction, and the imperative for participants to redeem this claim in their own actions accordingly. As a result, the imperative that leads to the general principle of access and conduct in any network is reproduced throughout the system as whole. Secondly, through including the validity claims pertaining to the specific discourses, which coordinate quasi-autonomous discourse networks. These claims exist on an ethical horizon pertaining to individual validity claims, such as the stop-the-war or anti-nuclear movements, but are still subject to a second level order of general reciprocity. The moral level describes the imperatives that protect e-democracy as a whole, while the ethical dimension of specific networks describes their form, the way they intersect and the negotiation of distinct spaces of difference. These are not what have been described as *counter-publics* (Fraser, 1992) because they do not demand identity predicates for membership or necessarily meet the discourses of other publics directly at any point, neither do they, as I suggested, have finite borders, existing more as increased densities of interaction within a multi-polar and multiple structure. While rejecting the antagonistic nature of contestation this concept entails the transformative possibilities of deliberation, disagreement and exclusion within and between quasi-autonomous discourse networks. This therefore addresses the first and second imperatives of a radical e-democracy. Firstly, in line with the imperative for a coordination of interests via open communication, a specific

network is defined by the range of its redeemable validity claims and cohered by the shared interests that are represented therein. This entails, secondly, reciprocity underpinned by deliberative agreement and/or disagreement.

The actually existing forms closest to such networks are those of new social movements. Mario Diani (2000), drawing on the work of Stein Rokkan and Georg Simmel, argues that the networks of social movements are characterised by Simmel's notion of 'intersection of social circles' (Diani, 2000, p. 387), and as such we can see them as groupings of various committed interests that manage to overcome certain entrenched and divisive 'political cleavage' (p. 387). Thus Diani argues that'[a] view of movements as social networks', means a 'capacity to develop systems of relationships which cut across established social and political cleavages' (p. 388). Given that social movements are one of the key components of civil society, and thus contribute to sustaining democratic discourse within it, it seems fair that this model can be extended more broadly to a whole range of deliberative practices in the network society. We can see that contestation and deliberation work in the context of crosscutting networks, and that these are widely visible across the Internet. This has been noted by W. Lance Bennett, who in analysing activism in Internet-driven circumstances notes that the broad spread of ideological, or value positions, means that there is far more capacity to absorb difference and fuel pluralism while being able to 'reduce the conflicts often associated with diverse players entering campaigns' (Bennett, 2003, p. 154), and that they may even 'harbour intellectual contradictions' (p. 154). Given the ubiquity of networks and their embedding in the social lifeworld the kind of e-democracy we can envision is thus one that must be rooted in social movements and more broadly in the social networks of civil society. Fitting such a situation into the model of a quasi-autonomous discourse network is not problematic, and therefore opens up both the descriptive and normative elements of the concept to a specific kind of organisation. This contributes to the satisfaction of the third imperative to enshrine the free association and affiliation of social movements as part of a radical e-democracy.

This concept of a quasi-autonomous discourse network also speaks to the economic justice imperative, specifically the question of workplace democracy, because networks do not exist only in civil society, but also intersect with networks of labour and capital. The more the instrumentally driven hierarchical structures of corporations and

state-run bureaucracies are organised into network structures, the more the steering of decisions is likely to be opened up to scrutiny and contestation by those networks. Namely, in whose interests and on what validity basis are choices made? In such communicative contexts the normative imperatives must be foregrounded in the face of institutionally unanswerable managers and holders of capital. This allows the opportunity to combine aspects of a radical e-democracy with a critique of capital underpinned by reciprocity, and consequently for imperatives supporting the democratic steering of production and distribution. Indeed this can be seen as already existing to an extent in the open source and free software movement. One potentially fruitful approach to supplement this can be found in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), who theorise that immaterial labour, of the sort prevalent in post-industrial societies, now has the capacity to self-organise and pose a profound threat to the capitalist order. Thus capital is threatened by a 'democracy of the multitude' (p. 328). While it can be no more than an aside here the possibility of incorporating the concept of multitude, despite Hardt and Negri's problematic dismissal of the category of civil society, into the quasi-autonomous discourse network may be an interesting one to pursue in the future.

Conclusion

While it would be impossible in this context to develop the ideas I have outlined in any greater detail I hope that such a conception of online politics goes some way to capturing the kind of things that the Internet is very good at, its hyperlinked forms, its polycentric structures and its capacity to form around shared discourses, while still leaving space for contestation. It also offers a normative framework to legitimise and work towards autonomy, reciprocity, freedom of association and economic justice. Because the Internet certainly does not produce such democratic forms by default, my claim is that by recognising the nascent form of the quasi-autonomous discourse network we might be in a position to pursue the imperatives it supports and to contribute to a radical e-democracy. Such a radical e-democracy would nurture a publicness in which individuals and communities contribute to the steering of the society and economy, without being subsumed into 'a public' that is in fact an abstracted discursive fantasy.

Note

1. I understand morality here in the sense of the right, as distinct from the good, and as operating in the domain of mutual recognition separately from local ethical values, and for the purpose of this argument is manifest in the concept of reciprocity. This is the sense in which Mouffe generally appears to use the term. However, there is some confusion and slippage when it suits her argument, where at such times she seems to conflate morality and ethics, for example in her discussion of American domestic politics in *On the Political* (2005, p. 73).

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7

Participation and/or Deliberation? The Internet as a Tool for Achieving Radical Democratic Aims

John Downey

Introduction

Cohen and Fung (2004) point to the recent resurgence of 'radical democratic' thought and politics that they have contributed to through their scholarly work and political activism. This has arisen, they argue, in response to the inability of national governments to govern effectively, especially so in a global age that has reduced national economic sovereignty, and to the increasingly obvious chasm between citizens and their representatives in 'conventional' democracies, reflected in reductions in memberships of political parties, voting at national and local elections, and so on. Calls for radical democratic change also clearly have a global dimension. Democracy ought to be both deeper and broader. Issues such as poverty, the uneven impact of environmental change, working conditions in poorer economies, and access to healthcare have animated activists to develop transnational social movements and networks and to call for the extension of democracy beyond the confines of the nation-state.

Radical democracy as a label has been adopted by a number of disparate thinkers and groups that draw their inspiration from a variety of not necessarily compatible sources ranging from post-structuralism to Western Marxism. One current could be roughly described as being eclectically Marxist in inspiration. The Real Utopias project at Wisconsin organized by Erik Olin Wright has held a number of conferences since 1991 that have led to a number of path-breaking collaborative books on thinking through present-day conditions and emancipatory possibilities (http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RealUtopias.htm). It has made a significant contribution to the development of 'progressive' thinking

particularly in the USA. Radical democrats are not or are no longer, by and large, revolutionaries; they promise different solutions that tend to be piecemeal and pragmatic. From a traditional Marxist perspective these solutions may appear naïve and timid rather than radical. They intend to ameliorate capitalism and liberal democracy rather than do away with it via some form of ruptural political change. The democratic deficit of conventional democracies together with the decline in the fortunes of traditional Marxism have prompted calls, then, for a 'radicalization' of democracy to make liberal democracies more 'participatory' and 'deliberative'.

This may be taken to mean two related but distinct things: on the one hand, that the mass media 'public sphere' ought to be more participatory and more deliberative and, on the other, that new forms of participatory-deliberative government ought to be invented that directly involve citizens in decision-making (Habermas, 1991). In this chapter I examine broader public sphere issues rather than review experiments using the Internet as a means to inform decision-making (recent work by Albrecht, 2006 and Coleman, 2004 overstate, in my view, the at best marginal democratic benefits of such experiments). Before proceeding, it is worth stating that I am in agreement with the normative goals of radical democrats although I am more sceptical concerning the possibilities of emancipatory transformation than they tend to be. The creation of more intensive and extensive forms of democracy is highly desirable. Calls for a radicalization of democracy are both more prudent and plausible than the traditional means suggested by radicals. Here the focus will be on present conditions and the possibilities of transformation with respect to the use of the Internet as a means to bring about 'radical democracy'.

One of the conduits through which a radicalization of democracy could occur, it is sometimes suggested, is via innovative use of 'new' information and communication technologies that would serve to make politics more transnational, more participatory, and more deliberative. The relatively cheap (as a mode of publishing), relatively open, and many-to-many character of Internet communications make it a prime suspect as a means through which democracies could be reinvigorated from the grassroots bypassing economic and political elites. In this chapter I contribute to the development a conceptual tool-kit to help us analyse this supposed connection and also briefly assess the extent to which the Internet has so far yielded a more participatory and deliberative political culture in order to illustrate the application of concepts. The results are mixed.

Participation and deliberation?

Cohen and Fung (2004) argue that the two aspects of calls for radical democracy – more participation and more deliberation – may find themselves at odds. More participation is essentially the demand for greater public involvement in formal decision-making and debate. Instead of decisions being left to representatives, the public should get involved and have a direct role. More participation, however, may not necessarily lead to a particularly enlightened debate either in terms of the range of views presented or the civility of the debate. More deliberation, on the other hand, is essentially the call for the public to pay attention to the force of the better argument. A more deliberative arena would be one where all could be participants, be listened to, be reasoned with, and where ultimately consensus would be reached purely through the force of the better argument winning out. This has implications both for the range of views presented and the style of debate. Greater participation in the public sphere or in a decision-making body may, therefore, not make it more deliberative. Also increased public involvement in the public sphere might indirectly affect the political decisions that get made through the debate influencing representatives. Then again, it might not. The public sphere might be both more participative and deliberative but there might not be a democratic bonus if the channels between the public sphere and representatives are severed.

As participation and deliberation may find themselves at odds, Cohen and Fung argue that a synthesis of participation and deliberation might be the best *modus operandi*; their 'participatory-deliberative' model is better suited, they claim, to radicalize democracy because the actual participation of citizens in decision-making means that there is both more participation and more deliberation. They point to a series of experiments at the level of local government where groups of citizens have been given a greater say in decision-making affecting, for example, housing or education in Chicago or budgeting in Porto Allegre (Fung & Wright, 2003). Cohen and Fung recognize that there are at least two challenges to this model – that representatives basically maintain control over the important decisions while allowing a participatory-deliberative fig-leaf to enhance the democratic legitimacy of the representatives and that it is unclear how such a model would work for large-scale national and transnational decisions such as deciding to go to war or addressing global warming.

If we would wish translate their ideas to the realm of the media, then the task is to construct 'participative-deliberative' communicative

spaces. Some see alternative media organizations such as Indymedia as embodying 'radical democracy' in terms of both structure and content (Pickard, 2006). While I would count myself as an enthusiastic supporter of Indymedia and other alternative media, there are good grounds to doubt both how participative and deliberative are and they can be often despite their best intentions given the context in which Indymedia and other alternative media exist.

Although information and communication technologies are not cited as the solution to these challenges by Cohen and Fung, they are regularly seen by radical democrats as one of the means through which radical democratic aims could be achieved. The calls for radical democracy have coincided with the development of the Internet as a popular medium in rich economies. Is this only a coincidence or are there good prospects that computer-mediated communication will contribute to the achievement of radical democratic aims?

Participation and exclusion

The advocates of deliberative democracy recognize that deliberation must rest on secure foundations of economic equality or at least substantially less economic inequality locally and globally:

> the informal public sphere must, for its part, enjoy the support of a societal basis in which equal rights of citizenship have become socially effective. Only in an egalitarian public of citizens that has emerged from the confines of class and thrown off the millennia-old shackles of social stratification and exploitation can the potential of an unleashed cultural pluralism fully develop.
>
> (Habermas, 1996, p. 308)

True enough. Living in absolute or relative poverty without access to decent shelter, food, and clothing is hardly a sound basis for deliberation not to speak of access to the means to engage in critical-rational debate. Radical democrats have called for a basic income irrespective of one's ability or desire to engage in paid work.

From this economic perspective, however, the prospects of deliberative democracy are not good. Far from speaking of a *long revolution* in the manner of Raymond Williams (1961), that is, a persistent and cumulative social democratization of society, we can speak of a *long reaction* to the social democratic gains made in the 1960s and 1970s in many advanced capitalist societies, that is, a persistent and cumulative

neo-liberalization of at least certain sectors of economy and society. Such a reaction is not caused exclusively by the advent of new information and communication technologies but such technologies have played their part in economic restructuring that has weakened and is weakening labour vis-à-vis capital.

The increased use of information and communication technologies are associated with an economic process that has resulted in increasing levels of wage inequality in developed economies in recent years. The rise of radical democratic thought has been coincidental with this increase in wage inequality. The wage ratio between skilled and unskilled workers increased by 16 per cent in the UK between 1979 and 1991 (De Santis, 2003). Real wages of unskilled workers have actually declined in the USA in recent years (Cline, 1997). How has this happened?

There are three common explanations for this. The first is de-unionization. Here weaker unions mean that they are less effective in protecting the pay and conditions of their members. The second is trade. Increased international trade, it is argued, means that unskilled workers in developed economies are competing with workers in developing economies thus driving down wages. The third is that there is the widespread occurrence of skill-biased technical change as a result of the increased use of computers and networks in production together with organizational change and the development of new products and services (Breshahan et al., 2002).

The introduction of computer systems in businesses encourages a limited substitution of automation for workers. Computers are much better at replacing routine tasks rather than more complex ones. Thus we have the simultaneous creation of both technological unemployment and higher skilled employment. Computer systems also result in information overload. The increase in data encourages firms to adapt to this by redistributing information processing tasks downwards to more autonomous production teams or production units (Breshahan et al., 2002). Although it is clearly a fallacy to speak of a homogenous working class before the advent of computers and associated organizational change, it is clear that some workers have been reskilled while some have been made deskilled and made redundant.

If we examine data concerning the distribution of wealth in the UK over the last thirty years, we discover that far from the preconditions for radical democracy being approached the data suggests that things are moving in the other direction (Table 7.1). Society is being stretched during this period of reaction and 'revolutionary' development of information and communication technologies:

Table 7.1 Distribution of wealth in the United Kingdom (percentage)

	1976	1986	1991	1996	2001
Most wealthy 1%	21	18	17	20	23
Most wealthy 25%	71	73	71	74	75
Most wealthy 50%	92	90	92	93	95

Source: Office of National Statistics (2004, p. 49).

As we know, income and wealth influence individuals' physical and mental health, educational attainment, social mobility, and so on. They also affect rates of participation in social organizations (political parties, environmental groups, unions, residents' associations) that make up the informal public sphere. In the UK in 2001 roughly 60 per cent of people with a university degree participated in such organizations whereas under 40 per cent of those with no qualifications were participants (Focus on Social Inequalities, 2004, p. 88). Voter turnout in General, Local and European elections has also declined over the last fifteen years or so. The least likely people to vote in the UK are the unemployed (48 per cent of the unemployed turned out in the 2001 General Election) (ibid., p. 91). Participation is not only a question of volition but also of possibility of access. For example, it is difficult to participate in a radical democratic discussion list via the Internet if one does not have ready access to the network.

In comparison to 2001 more UK households in 2004 had access to the Internet (52 per cent in October–November 2004 compared to 38 per cent in April–June 2001). The growth of Internet household penetration is slowing, however. After jumping roughly 10 percentage points in 2000 and 2001, growth is now running at around 3 per cent per annum. The recent boom of broadband access – up 40 per cent since 2003 so that now 36 per cent of households have broadband access (Dutton et al., 2005, p. 20) – means that it is the digital divide and not democracy that is deepening. With respect to Internet access and connection we may speak of three roughly evenly sized groups: the well connected, the connected, and the disconnected. Here differential use of information and communication technologies makes another contribution to growing levels of inequality. Presumably those who benefit from Internet use are already those who possess a disproportionate amount of income and wealth (Table 7.2).

A significant percentage of the population in the UK and in other rich countries presently do not participate in social organizations or take

Table 7.2 Internet access by household income deciles

1 = Lowest 10% 10 = Highest 10%	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**All**
2001/2	10	12	15	25	33	43	49	59	67	80	39
2003/4	15	15	20	37	41	55	60	71	78	89	48

Source: Adapted from Expenditure and Food Survey, Office of National Statistics (2004).

part in conventional democratic politics. While this is, to an extent, their choice borne out of either apathy or antipathy towards conventional politics, often because citizens do not see the point of participating, it is also because their economic and social circumstances make it difficult for them to participate. The first item on a radical democratic political agenda, therefore, would have to be a radical redistribution of income and wealth in order to facilitate participation and deliberation. However, social democratic parties that traditionally had moderately redistributive goals have back-peddled on such commitments in recent years in favour of increasingly neo-liberal approaches to the labour market and economic policy generally. This prompts the question concerning the provenance of such radical democratic social change. Generally speaking, advocates of such radical redistribution of income and wealth are regarded as freaks in the mass media public sphere, at least in the UK and USA, if they receive any attention at all.

If the Internet access and connection is currently more expensive and exclusive than 'old' communication technologies such as television, radio or newspapers, it does resemble the 'mass media' in one striking way: despite the proliferation of different sources of news and information we can now clearly witness the corporate domination of on-line attention (Dahlberg, 2005). The last 10 years or so have witnessed the increasing corporate domination of the Internet. By 2001 four companies controlled 50 per cent of user minutes of US citizens and AOL-Time Warner controlled almost a third by itself (ibid., p. 164). Comparatively few people set up their own Internet sites or blogs or visited sites that offer a different news agenda and style than the major corporations despite the inherent potential of the Internet to facilitate such activities. (We must wait to see if 'social networking' sites such as MySpace and Facebook change this but NewsCorp's purchase of MySpace for $580 million in 2005 does not augur well for MySpace as a participatory and deliberative communicative space.) The fact that the Internet is a relatively cheap way to publish obviously does not serve to offset the

advantages that large corporations have in attracting viewers (marketing and advertising budgets, resources to spend on developing content, available bandwidth, and so on).

However, it is not only a question of political economy. It is also a cultural political question that is broader than simply the domination of media communications by a relatively small number of corporations that own a proliferating number of media outlets and benefit from resulting synergies. In 2004 the Hansard Society in the UK carried out research to investigate the potential of blogs in the UK to revive UK democratic culture (Ferguson & Howell, 2004). Significantly, the reception research conducted by the Hansard Society reveals that the vast majority of people when presented with the blogs were, to put it conservatively, not greatly enthused. 'Jurors' found it 'difficult to connect with bloggers', 'could not find enough to empathize, or even disagree with, in what they read', and the blogs reviewed were 'marked by low levels of debate between visitors and this proved to be another turn-off for our jury' (ibid., p. 11). Political blogs in the UK are, at least for now, largely the preserve of the political elite. As the Hansard Society chose some of the more high profile and interesting UK political blogs to test on the jurors the results are salutary for those who consider that blogging could serve to revive democratic participation in the UK. A large majority of people who took part in the research did not see the point of blogs. Now this is not unrelated to the corporate domination of media communication but also clearly not reducible to it.

The notion of citizens being producers as well as consumers of news and opinion and the Internet being one big piazza is certainly attractive and one that is regularly touted by journalists and activists but this exercise in wish-fulfilment fails to correspond to the reality of the Internet irrespective of its largely untapped technological potential. The fact that the Internet resembles other mass media and is dominated by corporate communications is clearly bleak news for radical democrats. All is not necessarily lost, however.

Counter-publics as agents of transformation

A radical-democratically minded individual, having rejected violence and revolution as a political method and having read both volumes of *Theory of Communicative Action*, and aware of the necessity of removing economic inequalities as the *sine qua non* of radical democracy must go forth into civil society and the public sphere brandishing solely the force of the better argument and the possibility of engaging in acts of

non-violent direct action to publicize that better argument (Habermas, 1984). The problem with this is that the public sphere is not a 'level playing field'. Because of the corporate domination of mass media and increasingly the Internet the better argument (assuming that radical democrats have them in their pockets) fails to be heard. How can peripheral actors such as those arguing for radical democracy make an impact in the public sphere and on public opinion and through public opinion on political decision-making?

Although this is a very tall order, if we put Habermas (1996) and Fraser (1997) together and add in the benefits of information and communication technologies for resource poor groups, then we can produce a plausible scenario for bringing about social change from below.

First, we must set out distinctions between political system, functional system, lifeworld, and public sphere. The political system is where decisions are made, legislation is enacted, representatives are lobbied, and so on. Functional systems are made up of organizations that possess resources that can be used as sanctions and inducements to influence behaviour of others and that possess publicity resources to present themselves in the public sphere. The lifeworld is made up of, among others, groups in civil society that are generally comparatively resource poor with respect to states and corporations and usually struggle to make an impression in the public sphere under normal circumstances – for an account of the decoupling of systems world and lifeworld see Habermas (1987, pp. 153–99).

The public sphere is made up of *episodic* publics (that meet regularly in say public houses or coffee houses), *occasional* publics (that meet at specified times and places for particular events – theatre performances, music concerts, political demonstrations), and *abstract* publics (where physically isolated readers, listeners, and viewers are brought together via the mass media) (Habermas, 1996, p. 374).

Two additional concepts are helpful: a *sub-public* is where the members of a group consider themselves to be apart from and smaller than 'the public' but not opposed to 'the public' (for example, those with an overweening passion for fly-fishing may be said to form a sub-public that may meet episodically, occasionally, and abstractly); a *counter-public*, on the other hand, sees itself as a group that is opposed to opinions generally found in the public sphere and that wishes to bring about social change (the usual examples here are feminist or ecological counter-publics). Sub-publics tend to be inward-looking and focussed on intra-group relationships and interests. Counter-publics tend to be

Janus-faced, looking both inward to consolidate group membership and outward to society as a whole:

> In stratified societies, subaltern counter-publics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic of these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides.
>
> (Fraser, 1997, p. 82)

There are three amendments that should be made to Fraser's notion of counter-public (see Warner, 2002 for similar comments). The first is that they may not necessarily be composed of subalterns but of relatively powerful individuals that may possess both capital and cultural capital. Second, they may not necessarily be emancipatory in intent. The essential aspect of a counter-public is that the members of this group see themselves as wishing to bring about radical change to society as it currently exists. There could be, therefore, neo-fascist counter-publics and radical democratic counter-publics. The third is to question Fraser's emphasis on the dialectical nature of, on the one hand, group consolidation and solace and, on the other, agitation and recruitment. From the perspective of a counter-public, this may well be how they would function ideally but it is hardly credible to deny the possibility that counter-publics may be dysfunctional and provide essentially group consolidation and solace and rather less recruitment. Alternative media activists as well as left-wing activists have often been accused of developing a ghetto or siege mentality that emphasizes the consolidation of group identity rather than recruitment and is marked by a lack of deliberation in the sense of being open to competing ideas and opinions both of which are arguably highly counter-productive to achieving radical democratic aims of a participative and deliberative democracy (Carroll & Hackett, 2006).

Fraser's comments on counter-publics date back to the reception of the English translation of Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in the early 1990s. It was written before the Internet became a popular medium in rich countries in the 1990s. When Fraser writes concerning how counter-publics establish and sustain themselves she refers to bookshops, film screenings, newsletters, and so on. Clearly the universe of counter-publics has changed considerably as a consequence of the Internet as it provides a relatively low-cost means of disseminating counter-publicity and of making contacts and alliances

between geographically dispersed groups. It is not too far-fetched to speak of the development of an imagined transnational community of radicals and counter-publicists that has been largely enabled and certainly emboldened by the Internet. The Internet has supplemented the activities mentioned by Fraser rather than displacing them.

While this is of interest and importance, it is essential not to overestimate the weight of the Internet in comparison to television, radio and newspapers and their impact on public opinion. For radical democrats, for example, it is precisely those people who have arguably the most to gain from radical democracy who are presently excluded from Internet use. The Internet, therefore, is a useful tool for counter-publics in order to regroup and train for agitation and to engage in counter-publicity, but realistically in order for counter-publicity to be successful it has to breach the walls of the mass media public sphere and be carried to those who either are Internet disconnected or politically disenfranchised. How could this happen?

Under normal circumstances the public sphere is more apparent than real. Habermas characterizes this as a *Scheinoffenlichkeit*. The public sphere is only *apparent* for Habermas under normal circumstances because it is not what it thinks it is and is not what it ought to be. For Habermas the public sphere should be composed of public spaces where individuals can meet freely and equally, where they may deliberate without external constraint, without the threat of sanction or possibility of inducement, and where, as a consequence, the force of the better argument will prevail. Under normal circumstances, however, the public sphere is dominated by economically and politically powerful actors who act out or perform on the public stage in an attempt to win over public opinion and thus rule with consent as well as with sanctions and inducements. While media professionals may believe that they are informing the public or even acting as a watchdog over the actions of the powerful, in reality they are largely subservient to these interest groups.

This is undoubtedly both a compelling and reductionist model of the public sphere. It underestimates the amount of turbulence and potential for change both in the public sphere and in the system as a whole that may arise during periods of crisis. Turbulence is created by the confluence of three factors. The first is that the public sphere in normal circumstances operates in a self-contradictory way. On the one hand, the values of the public sphere are liberal universalist, that is, everyone is equal and has the right to participate. On the other, discourses in the public sphere are systematically dominated by those with political and/or economic power. This performative contradiction, however,

means that the 'bourgeois' public sphere is susceptible to immanent critique, critique from within or from the perspective of liberal universalism, and thus contains the potential for self-transformation: 'In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the universalist discourses of the bourgeois public sphere could no longer immunize themselves against a critique from within' (Habermas, 1996, p. 374). The second is that powerful organizations and interest groups are subject to crisis. They do not govern smoothly all of the time. They may struggle to reproduce themselves or provide sufficient sanctions or inducements to those that they govern. There is nothing inevitable about these crises. Powerful organizations are not their own gravediggers. Some of these crises may be more profound, durable, and fateful than others. The consequence of such crises in the public sphere is that media professionals, as it becomes clear that the established powers do not have adequate answers to the crisis and elite consensus diminishes and equipped with a self-image of being guardians of the public interest, open up to views previously regarded with derision. It may be that sections of the political and economic elites reform themselves to take account of the new conditions or crisis and this sets off a process of contestation within the public sphere which in turn opens up cracks that may be exploited, for example, by radical democrats. The third element is the action of counter-publics. During normal circumstances they are mostly excluded from the public sphere entirely or appear occasionally as freaks. During times of crisis and elite division, however, through skilful dramaturgical self-presentation they may penetrate the barriers of the public sphere and influence broader public opinion and may have some influence on elites and on political decision-making. Before getting too carried away with this scenario, however, it is worth remembering that counter-publics may be reactionary as well as emancipatory in intent.

The public sphere in normal circumstances is dominated by elites and powerful organizations and is actually only an apparent publicness based on exclusions. Because of the self-understanding of the liberal public sphere, however, and because the systems world is subject to crisis, there are opportunities for counter-publics to make their presence felt on public opinion and political decision-making. The extent of this depends very much, however, on the severity of crisis in the systems world, the ability of those systems to address the crisis, and the ability of elites to incorporate some of the demands of counter-publics. During times of crisis, therefore, the public sphere potentially becomes more genuinely public and less *apparently* public if only temporarily.

The advocates of radical democracy argue that the resurgence of radical democratic thought is a response to a crisis of legitimation of conventional democracies. Such crises provoke the growth of counter-publics and the use of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, facilitates the activities of counter-publics. This is a plausible scenario for a destabilization of the public sphere in conventional democracies, a greater publicness of the public sphere, and some socio-political change. Whatever the value of such predictions, however, this dynamic understanding of the public sphere that is related to the lifeworld and the systems world is a clear advance over traditional accounts of the public sphere at rest dominated by the economic and politically powerful. The implications of this argument are that if we wish to understand how the public sphere functions we need to concentrate not only on the machinations within the public sphere but also seek to understand the exogenous factors that influence the public sphere (events in systems world, lifeworld). Through doing so we may understand the mediating role that the public sphere plays in bringing about social change.

Deliberation and fragmentation

If this more dynamic and open understanding of the contemporary public sphere in liberal conventional democracies may lead to a certain feeling of optimism among those who believe that the enlightenment is indeed an unfinished project, then one would be wrong to ignore other plausible scenarios that may be less palatable for radical democrats – the political consequences of the proliferation of counter-publics and sub-publics. Before going further, it is worth stating that both the proliferation of counter-publics and of sub-publics ought to be understood in part as technologically enabled responses to legitimation crises within the public sphere. It is not an either/or; both are occurring simultaneously to produce a complex reconfiguration of the public sphere in conventional democracies.

Put bluntly, the proliferation of sub-publics argument is this: given increasing levels of wage and income inequality in developed societies, given increasing levels of political disengagement and disenfranchisement from 'conventional' politics, given trends towards marketization and corporate domination of broadcasting and the Internet, and given the possibility of increased numbers of channels and so on that digital technology enables, there has been a proliferation of counter- and sub-publics. Sub-publics are not motivated by a desire to transform conventional politics as

much as bypass it in order to pursue inward-looking personal interests and prerogatives. It should be understood, partly at least, as an internal psychological migration. Counter-publics may also have this character. Both counter-publics and sub-publics with their emphasis on group consolidation may serve to restrict both participation and deliberation.

Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (2005) have argued with respect to electronic communities that increased connectivity and improved filtering actually leads in most cases to less social integration. This happens for two reasons. The first is that humans have bounded rationality and that when faced with information overload such as that provided by the Internet and digital technologies will *generally* respond by specializing, by finding a niche and sticking to it. The second is that information technologies are 'a lubricant that enables the satisfaction of preferences against the friction of geography' (2005, p. 861). This means that generally speaking there is a 'de facto secession of individuals or groups from their geographical neighbourhoods' (2005, p. 862). Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson refer to this as a *cyberbalkanization* as individuals, radical democrats included, generally glue themselves into electronic enclaves that reflect their initial preferences and where they find confirmation of their beliefs. A further consequence of this is group polarization where individuals in enclaves become more committed to initial preferences or radicalize initial preferences as they encounter views that support their preferences and avoid those that question them. The implications of this for the prospects of radical democracy are obviously not good. Participation is restricted primarily to sub-publics and the deliberation that takes place is decidedly bounded – members of the sub-public and counter-public are not exposed to a full-range of arguments. When members of different sub-publics meet to discuss a common issue it is also unlikely that the quality of deliberation will be high if previous experience has encouraged members of sub-publics not to question the rationality of their own positions. What are the implications of *cyberbalkanization* for the possibility of emancipatory transformation?

Cass Sunstein's work (2001) is helpful for considering the implications of this for the practice of democracy and the potential for developing more intensive and extensive forms of democracy. He argues that for there to be a democratic culture the existence of formally free citizens is not sufficient but rather that they should have two additional elements: first, people should be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance. Unanticipated encounters involving topics and points of view that people have not sought out and perhaps find irritating are central to democracy and even to freedom itself; second,

many or most citizens should have a range of common experiences. Without shared experiences, a heterogeneous society will have a more difficult time addressing social problems and understanding one another.

If we take the work suggesting that the Internet encourages a *cyber-balkanization* then it is possible to argue that overall both unanticipated encounters and common experiences are in decline at least in terms of media consumption (and I would argue that social, political, and spatial segregation as well in developed societies is rising as a consequence of increasing inequality). Patterns of consumption seem to suggest that generally people in order to avoid the messy difficulties of taking part in something where people disagree with you both in principle and in detail and may not like you as a result or where you might come across something that you disagree with or even offends you. Of course, the Internet has the potential to open individuals up to new encounters and unexplored vistas. The existing empirical work on this tends to show that individuals inclined to seek out new experiences use the technology for this purpose and vice-versa. Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson conclude that 'other factors being equal, all that is required to reduce integration in most cases is that preferred interactions are more focused than existing interactions' (2005, p. 862). In certain respects mixed genre public service television channels (that are facing declining viewer figures as a consequence of the impact of digital television in Europe) are far more likely to surprise a citizen and confront him with new ideas and perspectives than the Internet despite the variety of views that are on offer simply because of the contrasting 'push' and 'pull' characters of television and Internet.

The fragmentation of the public sphere that has accompanied the diffusion of digital media is regularly seen as a bad thing for democracy because the preconditions for a deliberative democratic debate between 'the people' are eroded if individuals see themselves primarily as members of particular groups rather than a larger collectivity. Dahlberg has recently criticized this line of argument essentially along the lines of Fraser's notion of the desirability of the construction of counter-public spheres. He argues that, rather than fragmentation being a bad thing, 'Indeed, fragmentation into "like-minded" groups that contribute to a plurality of counter-discourses can now be *conceived* as beneficial for democracy' (Dahlberg, forthcoming). This is because an enclave allows space for voices and positions marginalized in the public sphere to be developed: 'Counter-discourse (with associated arenas, mediums, spaces, texts, and so on) provide safe spaces for the exploration and nurturing of marginalized voices ("extreme" positions and identities)

before explicit engagement with and challenge to dominant discourses in "mainstream" communication arenas' (Dahlberg, forthcoming).

While it is undoubtedly true that the Internet provides space for some, but clearly not all, marginalized voices to meet and develop positions there are two central concerns that should make us wary of seeing this as unambiguously 'beneficial for democracy'.

The first is that counter-publics are often not exposed to competing positions. They tend rather to construct 'straw man' positions that show their positions to be good and true. Opposing positions are regularly instrumentalized, caricatured, and easily dismissed by participants in counter-public spheres as part of the process of group consolidation. The problem with this is not that counter-publics develop 'extreme views' or prevent the generation of a 'middle ground consensus' but rather that counter-publics often fail to treat more distant others as equals through the misrecognition of competing positions. In addition both the potential for success and desirability of a counter-public depends on developing as coherent a position as possible on the issues at hand. This can best be achieved by exposure to the strongest arguments of alternative positions that can be used to test and improve the positions adopted by the counter-public. The problem is not that counter-publics have 'extreme views' but rather that often the extreme views are not as well developed as they might be because they are not rigorously contested.

The second concern is a purely politically pragmatic one. Counter-publics, if they are going to contribute to bringing about emancipatory social change, need to win recruits. Such a process of recruitment becomes even more difficult in a fragmented public sphere characterized by diverging communities of interest. In such an environment the existence of the preconditions of recruitment – the sharing of the same space and experiences – are increasingly open to question. The fragmentation of the public sphere may make it more difficult for resource poor groups to reach the plethora of different communities and audiences. Why bother about global warming when fly-fishing is far more worthwhile? Counter-publics may fail to find an audience, in other words, not simply because of traditional exclusions from the mass media public sphere but also because of audience fragmentation.

Conclusion

There has undoubtedly been a welcome resurgence of a wide variety of radical democratic thought in recent years in response both to the

crisis of the traditional Marxist left and the democratic deficits of 'conventional' liberal democracies. The watchwords of one current of this resurgence are greater participation and deliberation in the public sphere and in decision-making. Digital media, particularly the Internet, are often seen as enabling devices in the effort to bring these things about. In this chapter I have attempted to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the relationships between economic, social and political change, 'new' and 'old' media, and political actors whether resource poor or rich. In addition, I have sought to indicate how these concepts may illuminate issues of participation and deliberation with respect to the public sphere. The implications of Internet use for radical democracy are complex, mixed, and far from settled. There are four observations that may help us to analyse the relationship between radical democratic politics and the Internet, that I will discuss in turn.

The first observation is that we should consider this relationship holistically. If, for example, it is a precondition for radical democracy that greater economic prevails in order to facilitate participation and deliberation, then the uses of information technology in the workplace and economy generally should not be ignored. In the last two decades or so income inequality has increased in developed economies with 'conventional' democracies and the introduction of information technology together with organizational change, de-unionization, and increased international trade has contributed to this. The tide of history that for much of the post-World War II period encouraged radicals to speak of a long revolution has been effectively reversed.

The second observation is that we should examine the relationship between old and new media, corporate and alternative media, and view the public sphere as an uneven, dynamic, and complex mediator between competing but unequal forces. Under normal circumstances the public sphere is dominated by powerful groups and organizations – it may be an apparent public sphere – but this domination is rarely complete and the exclusions entailed in this domination mean that the public sphere operates through performative contradiction because it is based on liberal universalist presuppositions. The public sphere contains within itself therefore the possibility of self-transformation.

Third, as well as being susceptible to immanent critique, if we regard functional systems such as the economy as being subject to periodic

crises, then the public sphere can be subject to exogenous critique from the periphery. During periods of crisis previously powerful actors not only lose some of their power but also their ability to persuade media professionals. In such cases media professionals committed as they mostly are in liberal democracies to notions such as objectivity and public service may turn to relatively weak resource poor groups drawn from the lifeworld who may offer responses to the crisis and who publicize their cause through dramaturgical self-presentation. In such cases counter-publics may penetrate the walls of the mass media public sphere and may have some influence on public opinion and on political decision-making. Counter-publics may, however, be reactionary in intent as well as emancipatory. For every radical democrat counter-public there may be a neo-fascist one. Even 'radical democratic' websites, despite their best intentions, may not be particularly deliberative in their approach and may unwittingly discourage participation from a broader public. As Fraser points out counter-publics need to be both closed and open. If a counter-public is not open to new and challenging ideas or if it deters new users, then this may obviously be counter-productive both intellectually and politically for the radical democratic project.

Fourth, if the proliferation of counter-publics has been one technologically enabled response to the democratic deficit of conventional democracies and apparent public spheres, then the proliferation of sub-publics has been another. The causes of the growth of sub-publics, however, are political, economic, and technological. It is difficult to see how the fragmentation of the public sphere that such a growth in sub-publics represents is good news for greater participation and deliberation. This, when taken together with increasing economic and social inequalities and the retreat of social democracy in Europe and North America, presents a bleak picture for radical democrats. These crucial considerations are sometimes lost in more positive new media centric accounts of the potential of the Internet for democratic politics.

If we take these observations together then we are better placed to understand the relationship between the use of digital media and socio-political change. While it is essential to understand the character of alternative media many studies tend to focus exclusively on the radical character of alternative media or on democratic experiments using the Internet and tend to produce encouraging results from a democratic perspective. In order to understand the importance of information and

communication technologies for democracy (both positive and negative) we must set them firmly in their economic, political, and cultural contexts and when we do so then the prospects for emancipatory change appear, sadly, less rosy.

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8

The Internet and Discursive Exclusion: From Deliberative to Agonistic Public Sphere Theory

Lincoln Dahlberg

Introduction

The possibility of realizing a deliberative public sphere through the Internet has been of significant interest in Internet-democracy research. This deliberative public sphere, as the ideal for citizen participation in politics, involves rational debate between citizens over common problems leading to critically informed public opinion that can guide and scrutinize official decision-making processes. This conception lays claim to being radically democratic by extending public sovereignty through communicative rationality. In relation to the Internet, deliberative public sphere advocates and researchers are interested in the extent and quality of deliberation (and hence rational public opinion) being facilitated online, particularly given the celebrated interactive 'qualities' of the Internet.

In this chapter I question this public sphere conception as a radical democratic norm of Internet practice (and communicative interaction in general) given sustained critiques of the deliberative conception for failing to account fully for power and exclusion and thus for supporting status quo social and political systems. The aim of this questioning is not to discard the public sphere conception. Rather, the aim is to find a way to advance a more radically democratic public sphere norm, one adequate to contemporary digital communications.

I begin my examination by describing the deliberative public sphere conception as drawn upon in Internet-politics theory and research. I then identify what I see as the most significant problem undermining the conception's status as radically democratic: the failure to account for the democratic role of the politics associated with voices excluded from deliberations. To theorize the democratic role of such politics, I

refer to a second public sphere understanding that is being drawn upon and developed in Internet-democracy research and commentary. This second understanding I refer to as the 'agonistic' position because it emphasizes political struggle and conflict. The agonistic position is important here because it focuses upon discursive power and political practices from 'the margins', deploying the concept of counter-publics to do so. By drawing upon this agonistic Internet-democracy position, I am able to expand and thus radicalize the public sphere conception to account for the democratic role of politics associated with excluded voices.

The deliberative public sphere and the Internet

Habermas's (1984, 1989, 1996) public sphere theory is the most popular starting point for researchers evaluating the Internet-deliberative public sphere relationship.[1] Habermas argues that the public sphere is constituted by communicative rationality, which is interpreted variously, but can be generally understood to consist of inclusive, equalitarian, reflexive, reasoned, and reciprocal argument aimed at mutual understanding and agreement resulting in rational public opinion that can feed into and hold accountable formal political processes.[2] This public sphere conception is said to be radically democratic for two interrelated reasons. First, decision-making processes are subjected to the rational-critical deliberations and resulting public opinion of all those affected. Democratic power thus emanates from the communicative rationality of 'ordinary' citizens rather than from the formal decision-making processes of administrative, political, and economic elites. Second, the deliberative conception extends this public sovereignty to all situations in which deliberation takes place: the public sphere and resulting rational public opinion comes into existence whenever and wherever people engage in deliberation.

Deliberative democrats are interested in the Internet because they see it as offering the possibility for the extension of rational communication. As a result, there is a growing body of Internet-deliberative public sphere research (Dahlberg, 2001; Fang, 1995; Fung & Kedl, 2000; Gimmler, 2001; Graham, 2002; Janssen & Kies, 2005; Oblak, 2001; Schneider, 1997; Tanner, 2001; Wilhelm, 2000). This research focuses on the extent and quality of rational deliberation in online communicative spaces and on identifying the factors that facilitate and/or retard deliberation with the aim of identifying ways to further extend it. The general consensus is that deliberative criteria can be closely approximated

in online interactive spaces that expressly aim at achieving rational debate through effective rules of engagement, moderation systems, and interactive software tools. However, the researchers also conclude that the social context of the Internet's development and use is driving online politics towards pluralist interest group competition and individualist participation. These researchers fear that, as things stand, the future of Internet politics will not be the radical democracy of the deliberative model but 'politics as usual': state coercion, strategic bargaining, partisan rhetoric, dogmatic enclaves, activist disruptions, and destabilizing conflict (Clift, 2003; Fung & Kedl, 2000; Noveck, 2000; Sunstein, 2001; Wilhelm, 2000). It is worth quoting Steven Clift at length here. Clift is a well-known and highly respected global campaigner for online deliberative public spaces. He initiated and advises the longest-running and arguably most successful online 'independent' deliberative initiative (Minnesota E-Democracy). Clift (2003) warns that

> Those hoping for an almost accidental democratic transformation fostered by information technology will watch in shock from the sidelines as their favorite new medium becomes the arsenal of virtual civil war – civil wars among partisans at all levels. When I open e-mail from all sorts of American political parties and activist groups, I see conflict. I see unwillingness to compromise. Let's be optimists and suggest that the Net is doubling the activist population from five percent to ten percent. The harsh reality is that we are doubling the virtual soldiers, an expendable slash and burn online force, available to established political interests. As the excessive and bitter partisanship of the increased activist population leaks into the e-mail boxes of everyday people, I predict abhorrence of Net-era politics amongst the general citizenry. I fear the extreme erosion of public trust not just in government, but also most things public and political. Instead of encouraging networked citizen participation that improves the public results delivered in our democracies, left to its natural path, the Internet will be used to eliminate forms of constructive civic engagement by the other 90 percent of citizens. A 10 percent democracy of warring partisan is no democracy at all.

Given these concerns, deliberative democrats call for universities, civic organizations, and governments to support and develop online communicative spaces that facilitate deliberation, and to limit colonization of such spaces by instrumentalist-strategic action (Clift, 2003; Noveck, 2000; Sunstein, 2001; Wilhelm, 2000).

However, there is a significant problem with the deliberative public sphere conception that needs to be answered before it can be promoted as radically democratic (whether online or offline). The problem that I am referring to develops from the argument that deliberative democracy does not fully deal with power and exclusion in communicative rationality. Feminist/poststructuralist critics argue that, while deliberate democracy is concerned about communicative 'distortions' (including exclusions) resulting from explicit coercion, instrumental-strategic action, social inequalities, and technical limitations (such as in the technologies used), it does not deal with the disciplining and exclusion involved in the designation of a *particular* form of communication as *the* rational and democratically legitimate norm (Dean, 1996; Mouffe, 2000; Rabinovitch, 2001; Villa, 1992; Young, 2000). In order to be considered legitimate deliberators and citizens, subjects must come to internalize the rules of the deliberative form of communication deemed democratically valid or be excluded from the public sphere. As a result, participants whose 'naturalized' modes of communication are closer to what is deemed valid will be advantaged over others. That is, in order to be equally included, some participants must be more disciplined than others into fitting the idealized deliberative mode; disciplining that involves the exclusion (or repression) of those 'voices' deemed illegitimate (irrational, non-democratic, private).[3]

Yet a close reading of more sophisticated deliberative democratic arguments, such as Habermas's, finds that power imbalances and exclusion of voice are acknowledged as resulting from 'cultural bias' in both the context of the application of an idealized norm and the process of reconstructing such a universally valid norm of the public sphere. First, sophisticated deliberative democrats are aware that the interpretation of what satisfies an idealized norm of rational communication will depend on cultural assumptions within any particular situation of application, meaning that the validity and strength of particular arguments (in form and content) will be affected by cultural context, with some voices being marginalized or even excluded because they are interpreted as failing to meet the conditions set for good argument (for example, culturally specific protocols, forms of rhetoric, and story telling modes being deemed non-rational). Sophisticated deliberative democrats identify this deliberative inequality as another aspect of 'distorted communication' that leads to some participants gaining advantage over others simply due to their cultural situation affording them more 'legitimate' voices. Second, and more directly answering their critics, sophisticated deliberative democrats see any idealized norm as fallible – open to

critique and revision – because it is never derived from value free theoretical and empirical investigations. They admit that as a result of *this hypothetical status* we must assume that the application of such a norm will involve 'non-democratic' effects including exclusion of voice, exclusion due to the 'cultural bias' within the norm itself.

There is of course an essential philosophical difference between the positions of the deliberative democrats and their more poststructuralist inspired critics. On the one hand, the deliberative theorist believes in the theoretical *possibility* of both reconstructing a universal norm of rational communication and eliminating 'distorted communication' in practice. On the other hand, the poststructuralist sees the identification of such a universal norm, let alone its achievement, as *impossible* – following Derrida, they insist on the inherent undecidability of all meaning and the necessary failure of all rational communication, including reasoned understanding in both practical action and theoretical-scientific work.

However, this ontological difference does not translate into any significant substantial difference in understanding power and exclusion in relation to public sphere communication. As already seen, sophisticated deliberative democrats agree with their feminist/poststructuralist critics that in everyday situations we must assume that we are dealing with both a failure of communication to meet idealized normative standards ('distorted communication') and with the particularity of any idealized norm of democratic communication. As such they agree that ('non-democratic') exclusions will always be involved in attempts to institute democratic communication.

Where this ontological difference translates into a practical difference is in how these exclusions are dealt with. The deliberative democrat focuses upon how to achieve more rational-critical debate within communicative spaces, while their feminist/poststructuralist critics focus on the power and exclusion involved in the institution of such communication. This difference points first to the strength of deliberative democracy – the envisioning of normative procedures through which to implement and achieve deliberation within particular publics. However, the difference also points to the significant problem with the deliberative public sphere position. While acknowledging the disciplinary power and exclusions involved in instituting deliberation, deliberative democrats fail to theorize the democratic role of the politics associated with such exclusions. By ignoring this politics, the deliberative position fails as a radically democratic norm, which must account for how all voices can participate in political processes. In relation to Internet practice, the deliberative position

cannot account for that which is defined as illegitimate in spaces like Minnesota E-democracy that explicitly aim to institute rational debate (for example, promoting 'ideological' arguments are seen as illegitimate in Minnesota's forums). Moreover, the deliberative position has no place for movements that deploy non-deliberative activist protest actions. Such actions are not recognized in the deliberative model's emphasis on reciprocal, respectful communication. To address the democratic role of the politics associated with excluded voices we can draw upon the work of another group of Internet-public sphere theorists and researchers, whom I call 'agonist' because they focus on political struggle, parallelling political theorists like Mouffe (2005) who theorize the place of agonism in public sphere. However, against the agonistic pluralism of Mouffe, I will show how the agonistic public sphere theorists embrace a moral (normative) theory of democratic communication, articulating agonistic politics and deliberative publics through the concept of 'counter-publics'.

The agonistic public sphere and the Internet

Agonistic public sphere theorists conceive the Internet as a site of political struggle and conflict, a contested terrain (see Bickel, 2003; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Gallo, 2003; Kellner, 1998; Kahn & Kellner, 2005, 2007; Kowal, 2002; Langman, 2005; Palczewski, 2001; Salazar, 2003; Warf & Grimes, 1997). These theorists do not reject political conflict as deliberative democrats tend to do. Rather, they develop an understanding of the public sphere that makes central the agonistic politics associated with power and exclusion. I will now expand on this understanding, before showing, in the final section of this chapter, how their understanding provides the basis for a radicalized public sphere conception that accounts for the democratic role of the politics associated with deliberative-based exclusion.

The term discourse is helpful in explaining the agonistic understanding of the Internet as a site of political struggle. Discourse here is conceived as the socially contingent, taken-for-granted and value laden systems of signification that constitute all understandings, identities, actions, and institutions, including deliberative public sphere theorizing and interactions (Howarth, 2000). As such, the deliberative exclusions that we have been focusing on can be understood as discursively structured – the array of factors that are responsible for communicative exclusion (from explicit coercion to the definitions of what is illegitimate reasoning) are structured within conventional systems of

meaning and practice. Such discursively constituted deliberation and exclusion is readily acknowledged by sophisticated deliberative democrats. The problem with the deliberative public sphere position, restated in discursive terms, is that it does not account for the (democratic) politics associated with such discursive framing and exclusion.

Online political or discursive struggle takes place along multiple axes. However, agonists are particularly interested in one dimension of this struggle online, that between dominant and marginalized discourses. Here dominant discourses are those that have achieved, and attempt to maintain, authoritative or hegemonic status in any particular social formation, significantly structuring 'mainstream' communication including deliberation. These dominant discourses are defined in a negative relationship to the discourses which they subordinate – discourses that only weakly, if at all, impact upon the deliberations constituting the mainstream public sphere, and thus discourses associated with voices excluded from such deliberations.

What then is meant by the Internet as a site of discursive struggle, particularly in relation to democracy? On the one hand, the Internet is seen by agonists as reproducing dominant discourses, not just through sites of instrumental-strategic action but also through deliberative spaces. We can see this reproduction happening through dominant subject positions being brought online by privileged groups and individuals, who largely populate Internet communication, and we can see it even more explicitly through powerful social interests (corporations and governments) promoting dominant meanings and practices, via the ownership and control of the medium (Dahlberg, 2004a, 2005). On the other hand, and in contrast to the mass media, agonists see the Internet as supporting those voices associated with marginalized discourses to do three inter-related things with respect to democratic politics: to develop their own deliberative spaces that draw upon and strengthen marginalized discourses; to link up with other excluded voices in developing representative, strategically effective counter-discourses; and subsequently to contest those meanings and practices dominating mainstream public sphere(s). I will discuss each of these three aspects in turn, with examples taken mostly from the agonist literature.

First, the Internet provides communication spaces (e-lists, blogs, websites) for members of groups associated with marginalized discourses and deliberative exclusions to develop counter-publics[4] – 'alternative' discursive arenas constituted by a number of participants engaging in debate and criticism that strengthens and develops oppositional

discourses (identities, interpretations, social imaginaries, and languages) to those dominating the mainstream public sphere. Three examples given in the agonist literature are the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), the Zapatistas, and Indymedia. RAWA (www.rawa.org) is an organization that uses the Internet to develop alternative social imaginaries and identities, and subsequently resistance against oppressive gender-based norms of public and private life, including those norms supported by dominant discourses in Afghanistan that make online communication the safest form of political interaction for Afghan women (Bickel, 2003). In the now classic case of the Zapatistas' use of Internet to support a counter-public to develop an oppositional discourse and identity to neo-liberalism, we can refer to Kowal's (2002, p. 199) summary: 'Through Websites, e-mail exchanges, and other pluralistic discursive practices such as encuentros [spaces of encounter between Zapatistas and their national and international civil society supporters] the Zapatistas, in effect, constitute an autonomous, separate, and distinct "counter-public sphere" . . . . The Zapatista movement is a response to exclusion, and their use of the Internet has carved out a space to question the motives of neoliberal policies, deliberate, and even experiment with alternative political structures.' The third example involves the way the decentralized Indymedia network and other alternative online media projects support counter-publics. These media do not simply provide progressive news and information but, as participatory (open) publishers, constitute counter-publics where those identifying with marginalized positions can undertake supportive deliberation on issues of common concern and develop/strengthen counter-identities and discourses (Downey & Fenton, 2003, pp. 186–7; Langman, 2005).

These examples illustrate Internet supported counter-publics operating in political contexts that range widely in terms of discursive openness, from explicitly coercive to formally democratic. In terms of radicalizing the public sphere to theorize the democratic role of deliberative-based exclusion, it is most important to explore the operation of counter-publics in situations favourable to deliberative democratic procedures. The agonist literature does this particularly well in relation to the anti-globalism[5] (or alter-globalization) movement, showing how Internet-supported counter-publics have developed online – for instance through the Indymedia network – in response to exclusions of voice from purportedly democratic public spheres and institutions. Beyond the agonist literature we can find many other examples of counter-publics developing through the Internet, including in contexts where there is explicit support of deliberative

democracy. For instance, the indigenous counter-public Aotearoa café (http://www.aotearoa.maori.nz/) offers a discussion space that takes seriously reasoning based on Maori spirituality, myth, tradition, language, and sovereignty claims, reasoning that is largely ignored in New Zealand's formerly democratic mainstream public sphere.

Counter-publics are not *necessarily* of a 'progressive' mould. As Warf and Grimes (1997, p. 269) state, '[c]ounter-hegemonic uses are not an electronic monopoly of the political left'. And Downey and Fenton (2003, p. 198) note, 'A cursory investigation of the contents of the Web reveals thousands of radical right-wing sites constructed by individuals and groups who see themselves as being excluded from the mass-media.' We can find neo-Nazi, nationalist, religious fundamentalist, and other anti-democratic groups using the Internet to communicate and develop their identities, in response to the exclusion of their voices from liberal-pluralist and global capitalist discourse. But it must be asked, to what extent can such online groups represent counter-publics given that a 'public' normatively demands open, reflexive, and reciprocal communications, at least within the group?

It is worth briefly exploring a particular case to answer this question. Warf and Grimes refer to Aryan Nations (http://www.aryan-nations.org/), a US based but internationally linked neo-Nazi and White supremacist organization, as an example of a right-wing counter-hegemonic group actively using the Internet to network globally dispersed sympathizers and contest dominant discourses. Aryan Nations is indeed counter-hegemonic in relation to the dominant multi-culturalist discourse in the United States and other Western nations. But can it be said to operate as a counter-*public*, particularly with respect to its online communications? At first sight, the Aryan Nations' website indicates 'public' type activity. The site provides discussion forums for members that are open to view by visitors to the site. Here questions are asked and answered, discussions take place about what Aryan Nations stands for and its direction, and support is developed for individuals in forming their 'Aryan identity'. There is even a degree of 'reasoned' debate – for example, there has been some argumentation backed by references to various forms of historical evidence about whether the 'Turks' are 'Aryan allies' or 'Jewish enemies' and what the role of women should be in an 'Aryan society'. However, discussions are largely homogeneous and conform to, rather than critically engaging with, the Aryan Nations' dogma, values, and aims.[6] Discussion areas are predefined and moderated by the 'priesthood' (pastors and chaplains) who are active in discussions, advising on Aryan philosophy and putting right 'incorrect

thinking'. Debate is generally discouraged. The 'about' page emphasizes that action towards achieving the goals of an Aryan 'homeland' should be the aim of all members, and not the 'petty debate' and 'problem-oriented futility which characterizes many of the non-mainstream political groups in North America'. The limited amount of argument that takes place on the discussion spaces is oriented to participants clarifying their understanding, with the help of interventions by members of the 'priesthood', of Aryan Nations' position on the particular issue being discussed. The website as a whole is top-down, with information provided by the 'priesthood' to educate members of the pre-defined Aryan Nations' philosophy and goals.[7] Thus, the Aryan Nations online communications can be said to indicate a counter-hegemonic interest group but no more than the weakest of counter-publics.

This example is valuable for emphasizing two things: first, that it is important to assess the particularity of each counter-hegemonic activity to determine whether and to what extent it may constitute counter-public practice; second, that it is reasonable to assume that groups embracing values of openness, equality, inclusion, reciprocity, and reflexivity are more likely to operate as counter-publics. Given the latter, it is valid to concentrate on progressive groups when considering the democratic role of the practices of excluded voices in the public sphere, although it is important to keep in mind less-progressive, right-wing activities.

The second part of the agonist argument about the Internet in relation to the democratic politics of marginalized discursive and deliberatively excluded voices is that the Net (interactivity and reach) assists politically diverse and geographically dispersed counter-publics network and develop articulations of collective identities and discourses, leading to the formation of stronger and more effective oppositional discourses (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). Identification is particularly found through common experiences of exclusion and domination. This articulation of identity and discourse gives strength to marginalized publics otherwise vulnerable to being isolated, assimilated, or reduced to interest group politics.

The most widely cited examples by agonist democrats of the Internet supporting discursive articulation are in relation to anti-globalism: the e-mail list and website mobilizations of global support for the Zapatistas and the articulation of their anti-neo-liberal discourse with the discourse(s) of the growing movement against global capitalism, which is seen by agonists as significant for the growth of anti-globalist consciousness and activism (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Garrido & Halavais, 2003;

Kellner, 1998; Kowal, 2002); Indymedia sites linking geographically and ideologically dispersed voices of the anti-globalism movement – helping to articulate the discourse of a range of groups including human rights activists, anti-capitalists, environmentalists, unionists, and animal rights advocates (Downey & Fenton, 2003, pp. 186–7; Langman, 2005); and the transnational advocacy movement that utilized the Internet to transmit information about, and successfully organize resistance to, the Multi lateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in the late 1990s (Johnston & Laxer, 2003; Langman, 2005; Smith & Smythe, 2001). Recently, agonists have also pointed to the discursive articulations developing in relation to resistance to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq (Gallo, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). Particular social movement counter-publics – from student to anti-globalism to human rights to ex-servicemen – have found commonality through the anti-war discourse.

Again, one can find many other examples outside the agonist literature of how the Internet is supporting the articulation of counter-public discourse. Debate on Aotearoa café, to follow the example introduced above, extends beyond issues relating specifically to Maori identity and justice, linking to discourses of universal human rights, peace, anti-capitalism, environmentalism, and feminism. It is important to keep in mind that the Internet is also supporting non-progressive groups to link up and form representative counter-discourses. The online communications of Aryan Nations, for example, point to how non-progressive counter-hegemonic (interest) groups and associated discourses are being actively articulated online. Aryan Nations provides links to, information on, and contributions from other white supremacist and fascist groups. Aryan Nations also draws links to, and attempts to appropriate, sectarian and militant 'Jihadist' Islamist discourse. 'Jihad' – signified here as 'holy war' as against other Islamic interpretations – has in fact become a central articulatory signifier; an 'Aryan Jihad' is spoken of as the general aim of all these groups, whether Nazi or Islamic. A war to racially clean Aryan 'homelands', which is strategically interpreted to include Iranian-Arabic lands, is called for against Jews in particular and multi-culturalism in general, the named 'enemies' of Aryan identity that enable the constitution of this far right discourse. The Aryan Nations' website is seen as important for interpellating followers as Jihadist warriors. The site even has a 'Minister of Islamic Liaison' contributing articles and comment discussing and promoting the claimed synergistic relationships between (an extremely sectarian version of) Islam and Aryanism. The site also encourages Muslims interested in Jihad against the 'Judaic system' to join in online information sharing

and activist strategy discussions in relation to common goals.[8] However, parallelling the discussion above, we have to differentiate such counter-hegemonic meta-discourse from the counter-hegemonic *and* counter-public meta-discourses of deliberative-based groups. Any contribution of the Aryan-Jihadic and other non-deliberative meta-discourse to an agonistic public sphere is undermined by the lack of critical-reflexive, reciprocal communication involved. In fact, we may expect that such closed and unreflexive counter-discourse may be a major impediment to agonistic politics, prompting dominant discourses to further resist both these and more progressive discourses.

This inter-discursive contestation at the boundaries of the dominant public sphere leads us to the third aspect of the agonistic argument in relation to the politics of excluded voices. The agonists see the medium's interactivity supporting counter-public contestation (online and offline) of dominant discourses, and hence the contestation of the boundaries of deliberation and resulting exclusions of the mainstream public sphere. For a start, the Internet helps counter-public activists organize physical protests of all sorts (marches, poster art, sit-ins, and so on), at local, national, and international levels. Examples particularly pointed to by agonist commentators again involve the Internet supporting anti-globalism activism and anti-Iraq war protests. The Internet helps provide information and coordination before and during protest actions. It also enables counter-public representations of the events at stake to be distributed to supporters and the wider community, countering, and sometimes infiltrating, dominant discursive (and mass media propagated) representations.

The Internet also enables the organization and implementation of discursive contestation online. The examples of this contestation most readily cited by agonist cyber-theorists are again those of the use of the Internet in relation to anti-globalism movement. Agonist commentators point to the fact that some of the critiques of dominant discourse undertaken in e-mail discussion spaces, alternative media, and weblogs has made enough 'noise' to get noticed by, and followed up in, online and offline mass media (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Kowal, 2002). Agonists also acknowledge the democratic aspects of both politically motivated 'defacements' of websites and electronic civil disobedience such as 'electronic-sit-ins' that slow down or block targeted websites (Kahn & Kellner, 2005, p. 87; Palczewski, 2001). Such actions are deplored by 'digitally correct' hacktivists for undermining the integrity of the system and thus communicative freedom (see Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Jordan, 2007), but are seen by agonists as democratically

legitimate when aimed at the contestation of mainstream deliberative boundaries and hegemonic discourses. Satirical websites may also be seen as examples of online counter-public contestation, although they have yet to be prominently discussed in the agonist literature. For example, The Yes Men (theyesmen.org/) have set up parody websites that have been mistaken for the 'authentic' sites of major liberal-capitalist organizations (WTO/GATT, Bush Administration, DOW, Halliburton). As a result The Yes Men have been invited to speak on behalf of these organizations at International economic meetings and in the mainstream mass media, and deploying satire have undertaken counter-discursive interventions in dominant discursively framed deliberations.

Digitally correct hacktivist opposition to electronic civil disobedience highlights the question of what form contestation can legitimately take to remain democratic. In order to challenge those discourses dominating the deliberations of the mainstream public sphere, protest action must clearly go beyond the 'legitimate' rules of deliberation bounding such deliberation. 'Non-violent' direct action is needed, including disruption of the systems of communication that lead to the extension of dominant discourse. This is in contrast to the rejection of such actions as undemocratic by many deliberative democrats and politically correct hacktivists, among others.[9] Certainly, the type of individualist and non-deliberative interest group competition that dominates existing liberal democratic systems must be opposed, as Steven Clift rightly argues in the quote cited earlier. However, such rejection must not be because of the activism involved, but because of the lack of critical-reflexive and reciprocal interaction within the groups concerned. The 'citizen' and the 'activist' need to be understood as complementary identities, bringing deliberation and protest together for advancing radical democracy.

Counter-public contestation of dominant discourse is clearly seen in organized protest. There is another less explicit and possibly more effective form of discursive contestation supported by the Internet that has yet to be adequately explored in the agonist literature. I am referring to the 'quiet' dissemination of counter-discourses (including practices); dissemination which the decentralized, interactive, and hyper-linked communications of the Internet significantly contribute to. The very formation and extension of counter-publics online (and offline) signals the development and extension of discourses, identities, and ways of being that challenge the hegemony of dominant discourses (understandings and practices) online and offline. For instance, anti-globalism activists' online information sharing and organizing has lead to the

development of successful decentralized, cooperative networking practices and open publishing systems (Indymedia being the classic example) that stand as a genuine alternative to the political-economy of capitalist communication systems. These anti-capitalist counter-publics are not just voicing an alternative rhetoric but developing alternative practices that contest the dominant discourses (including practices) by replacing them. They are part of a larger open-source movement. This movement supports a culture of creative and successful software and content (from music to dictionary definitions) development and distribution, which directly challenges the capitalist private property economics of the major software and media corporations. This is an area explored more by autonomist Marxists (see Dyer-Witheford, 2004). It is understandable for agonists to be cautious in emphasizing this form of contestation as it is largely confined to those discursive practices that involve the so-called dematerialized, information, intellectual, or cultural goods. There are, however, many community groups using the Internet to organize non-capitalist 'physical goods' production and distribution as well as nascent online projects like FreeCycle.org promoting the giving away of 'previously loved' material goods. The development of such projects and the extent to which they offer a challenge to the globally dominant consumer-private property discourse needs to be further explored and supported by radical democrats.

The radicalized public sphere and online practice

The agonist position does not simply offer a description of the formation of counter-publics online and the contestations of dominant discourse that results, but is normative. According to the agonistic argument, to advance democracy in the context of dominant discursive structuring of communicative interaction, the public sphere, as a general normative conceptualization, *should* include the three aspects outlined above: the development of counter-publics where marginalized or oppositional discourses can be reflexively fostered; the articulation of these counter-discourses to enable the formation of strong oppositional identities and meta-discourses; and subsequently, the counter-public contestation of dominant discourses and mainstream public sphere deliberations.

Introducing discursive struggle does not do away with deliberation. Rather, the idea of contestation between discourses is added to the emphasis on deliberative publics. The agonistic public sphere understanding, through the key concept of counter-publics, makes central

both intra-discursive deliberation that constitutes publics (as against interest groups) and inter-discursive contest that challenges deliberative exclusions. The result is a radicalized public sphere conception, radicalized in relation to the deliberative model in that it extends public sphere theory to include politics associated with voices excluded from mainstream public spheres. The radicalized conception gives democratic legitimacy to voices and struggles from outside what is deemed within any particular political context to be 'legitimate' deliberation.

I need to emphasize that dominant discourse is not here deemed 'bad' and counter-discourse 'good'. The normative conceptualization outlined above places no value judgment on the content of discourses or of the associated deliberations. The focus here is upon the democratic role of the contestation that develops from out of discursively constituted exclusions from mainstream public spheres. This does not deny that counter-publics and discourses will, and should, themselves be contested and transformed. Neither does it deny that contestation must also be thought beyond the dominant-marginalized axis – discursive contestation may take place at various levels, such as between marginalized publics that become antagonistic towards each other rather than find common elements around which to articulate (for example, communist and Marxist groups marginalized in Western liberal democracies are notorious for 'fighting among themselves'). However, as noted above, the focus here is on contestation between dominant and marginalized discourse as this is the axis upon which mainstream public sphere deliberation and exclusion is largely based.

Radical democracy is here understood as being advanced through a heterogeneous public sphere of multiple and contesting deliberative publics, both dominant and counter. This radical pluralism is seen as positive because it is based upon deliberation and articulation rather than upon the interest group competition of liberal pluralism that some Internet-deliberative commentators see as leading to warring partisan enclaves (Clift, 2003; Sunstein, 2001). This chapter is not by any means the final word in outlining a radicalized public sphere. More work is needed to interrogate, develop, and strengthen this normative conception, work that will benefit from drawing upon other radical democratic approaches such as autonomous Marxism (see Dyer-Witheford, 2004, 2007). However, I believe that the agonistic public sphere position outlined here is an important advance over the standard deliberative theory so prominent now in much Internet-democracy academic commentary, research, civic practice, and even policy-making.

What then of present Internet practices in advancing this radicalized conception – are they supporting the development of counter-publics and associated discourse that can actively and effectively contest the discursive boundaries of the mainstream public sphere? We know they do to a certain extent from agonist explorations of online struggles. Observation and current research also indicate, as agonists and deliberative democrats alike agree, that the Internet is facilitating administrative power, flows of capital, liberal-consumer logics, and the extension of a range of conservative and reactionary discourses that shut down counter-publics and alternative voices. The question for radical democratic adherents is how to further advance counter-public discourses given these anti-democratic forces. Some, if not much, of the energy that is currently being put into promoting deliberative democracy in mainstream public spaces through the Internet, particularly in the United States,[10] needs to be redirected to promoting counter-public deliberation, articulation, and activism. Efforts focused on mainstream deliberative arenas fail to attend to the discursive exclusions that leave the most powerless even more marginalized. A healthy public sphere needs counter-discursive groups to be developed into counter-publics and not top-down interest groups. We can conclude that, for advancing the public sphere through the Internet, the most energy must be focused on promoting those least resourced groups committed to using the Internet (and other means) to deliberatively foster marginalized discourses and counter-public contestations of dominant discourse.

Notes

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1. Internet-deliberative public sphere research drawing upon Habermas includes Dahlberg (2001), Fang (1995), Graham (2002), Janssen & Kies (2005), Schneider (1997), and Wilhelm (2000). Other deliberative public sphere theorists drawn upon by Internet-democracy commentators and researchers include Barber (1984), Bohman (1996), Fishkin (1991), and Gutman & Thompson (1996). However, these theorists themselves draw upon Habermas's work to various extents.
2. See Dahlberg (2004b) for my reading of Habermas's public sphere theory in terms of a set of deliberative democratic criteria.
3. 'Voice' here is not a '*thing* owned by anyone', but an inter-textual and mediated 'public occurrence' (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 483).
4. 'Counter-publics' here draws from Fraser's (1992) discussion of *subaltern* counter-publics (referring specifically to subordinated social group participation) and Negt and Kluge's (1993) work on the proletarian public sphere.

5. Globalism here refers to the global spread of capitalism, as distinct from globalization in general. The latter includes the development of global communication systems, namely the Internet, which are relied upon by the anti-globalism protestors.
6. Many so-called progressive (democratically-oriented) sites also suffer from a homogeneous discourse. However, the impulse towards democracy provides a basis for immanent critique that helps move progressive discourse towards greater reflexivity. This impulse is absent from – and even opposed by – far right groups.
7. Atton (2006, p. 573) found the discourse of the British National Party to be similarly 'hierarchically determined', and 'far from the more open, non-hierarchical practices of "progressive" alternative media'.
8. Some postings on the Aryan Nations' discussion boards come with the claim that the author is Muslim. However, there is no evidence that any Islamic group supports the site.
9. See Young (2001) for an outline of deliberative democratic concerns about activism and for a robust argument of the importance of activism in contesting the discursive boundaries and bringing to the attention of mainstream public[s] the voices of excluded groups.
10. As well as the academic research referenced in this chapter there are major research initiatives, particularly in the United States, that focus upon how the Internet can contribute to the advancement of deliberative democracy. See, for instance, the Democracy in Cyberspace Initiative at Yale University (http://islandia.law.yale.edu/isp/strongdem/overview.html), Community Connections at Carnegie Mellon (http://communityconnections.heinz.cmu.edu/about/index.jsp), and the Online Deliberative Democracy Consortium (http://wiki.deliberative-democracy.net/index.php/ODDC). There are also significant civic projects actively promoting deliberative democracy, including e-thePeople.org and Politalk.org. All URLs here retrieved 3 August 2006.

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9

Multicultural Radical Democracy and Online Islam

Eugenia Siapera

Introduction

This chapter takes issue with two parallel aspects of the complex relationship between multiculturalism, radical democratic politics, and the Internet. First, with the exclusion of Islam in radical democratic accounts; and second, with the overemphasis on activism and/or deliberation in accounts of the political Internet. The first may contribute to the reactionary radicalization of online Islam, and to the frustration and disenfranchisement felt by a growing part of Muslim communities. The second aspect may overlook the political significance of communicative practices because they are found in unexpected sites and take unexpected forms. Conversely, identifying and theorizing the communicative practices encountered in 'everyday' prosaic sites could contribute to a revision of radical democratic accounts to incorporate the actually existing plurality of everyday life.

The focus here is on online Islam, which may be understood as the paradigmatic Other of 'Western modernity'. But the problem is not only this type of exclusion: after all, it is only to be expected given the collusions between Orientalism and Imperialism. It is more problematic, from a radical democratic point of view, that Islam is almost unquestionably excluded in radical democratic accounts. The first section of this chapter will therefore critically discuss the exclusion of Islam in the radical democratic discourses associated with Habermas, and Laclau and Mouffe. The main critique is that both versions ultimately rely on an a priori acceptance of common rules and procedures, overlooking the ways in which these must be the outcome of political encounters rather than their premise.

A reformulation of radical democratic politics from a multicultural perspective may begin with a broadening of the definition of the political.

Additionally, insofar as we are concerned with the articulation of commonalities, communicative processes must be foregrounded. The second section will therefore seek to formulate an alternative understanding of the political, which on the one hand encompasses the critique of radical democracy from a multicultural point of view, and on the other allows for the incorporation of a wide variety of communicative practices as politically relevant.

The third section will employ these points in an analysis of online Islam. This will focus on the commonalities that online Islam attempts to create through varied communicative practices. The discussion of these commonalities will subsequently seek to identify their political significance, and the ways in which they may lead to an alternative, and broader, understanding of the role of the Internet in radical democratic efforts. Viewing the Internet as an agonistic terrain for enacting and performing multiple ways of relating to Islam, I will argue that Islam online engenders a kind of engagement, which may contribute to a multicultural radical democratic project. This potential, however, remains suspended until the performative production of new forms of connection are responded to by the publics/communities they address or create.

Radical democracy and the exclusion of Islam

Although both terms 'radical democracy' and 'multiculturalism' are contested, I will assume minimal definitions for the sake of clarity. For radical democracy, the minimum criteria include first constant reflection and questioning, and second, a return to the roots of democracy, understood as involving the notions of equality, liberty and community. For multiculturalism, the minimum criteria include the creation and safeguarding of the possibility of difference in the context of life together. In political theory, radical democracy has many guises, not all of them compatible. Given their popularity and impact in the field, this section will focus on two strands: the Habermasian, deliberative democratic model and the agonistic radical democratic model. This section will discuss these approaches in terms of the kind of multicultural radical democratic politics to which they lead, and the room that this leaves for Islam.[1]

Multiculturalism in deliberative democratic terms

Habermas's (1994) main argument proceeds through separating the domain of the political from the ethico-cultural. This allows Habermas to argue that there are two levels of integration, the political and the

cultural. The former requires 'assimilation to the way in which the autonomy of the citizens is institutionalized in the recipient society and the way the "public use of reason" is practised there' (ibid., p. 138). Cultural integration requires endorsement of 'the way of life, the practices, and customs of the local culture' (ibid.). Political integration is crucial for the functioning of a multicultural democracy, which could then incorporate a multitude of communities. This type of political integration is what Habermas (2001) refers to as constitutional patriotism and it requires the loyalty of citizens to the political system while allowing for cultural heterogeneity.

Habermas further argues that the preservation of distinct cultures is not an obligation of the state, but falls on the communities themselves, which should subject their claims to the principles of rational justification. In this manner, their survival and vitality is ensured, and their dynamism safeguarded rather than preserved in terms of fixed and ascribed identities. This aspect of Habermas's argument is crucial in that it widens the applicability of the 'discourse principle'[2] to include cultural communities. In this sense, although the separation between politics and culture appears in the first instance to render culture politically irrelevant, a closer look reveals that in fact culture is politicized, in the sense of becoming subject to political or deliberative processes.

When these ideas are applied to Muslim communities living in Muslim-minority countries, a complex and not altogether positive picture emerges. First, the concept of constitutional patriotism and the supposed 'ethical neutrality' mean that Islamic ethico-moral understandings are actively excluded from the mainstream political domain. In other words, the possibility of a politics engaged with the ethical and moral imperatives of the Qur'an and their legal implications is a priori dismissed in a political culture that requires first and foremost unquestionable loyalty to the existing system. In more pragmatic terms, the 'ethical neutrality' of the state has consistently demonstrated its preference for a secular/Christian ethics, as shown by the prohibition of *hijab*-wearing women from public posts in both France and Germany.

But while culture is formally excluded from politics, it must to some extent compete or otherwise engage with other cultures in order to survive in a pluri-cultural context. For Islam as a culture (that is, as a collection of experiences, histories, artefacts, symbols, and so on) this means that it must subject itself to public rational argument. In the context of Muslim-minority countries, the onus is on Muslim citizens to justify why, for example, they choose or not to wear a beard, or the *hijab*, to abstain from alcohol and so forth, rather than on members of

the majority culture. And given that such choices do not always lend themselves to 'secular' rational justification, the upshot is that they are dismissed as irrational, or marginalized and ridiculed. The problem here is that Habermas operates on the premise of an already existing equality or equivalence of cultures, overlooking that in most cases cultures and communities must not only fight for recognition of their equal status and equivalence, but that the premises of this struggle are already set. And in his insistence upon rational justification, he overlooks the specific value and weight placed on this as part and parcel of Western modernity.

This politicization of culture creates a double bind: culture must be rationalized, deliberated or otherwise become accountable to the political; but when it enters the domain of the political its input is severely constrained by the premise of constitutional patriotism, requiring loyalty to what is already there. More broadly, if we accept that radical democratic politics involves reflection and questioning of the basic premises of democracy, then the argument of constitutional patriotism appears to arbitrarily halt this process, and to limit the ways of reflection.

Multiculturalism and agonistic pluralism

The main premises for agonistic radical democracy include that the dimension of the political involves irresolvable antagonism, and that power is a constitutive dimension of society. On these two premises, Mouffe (2000) goes on to suggest a political model which does not seek to eradicate the distinction between 'us' and 'them', but to rethink 'them' as the 'adversary' rather than an enemy to be destroyed. Making a distinction between antagonism, understood as struggle between enemies, and agonism, which is struggle between adversaries, that is between people who see themselves as 'legitimate enemies' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 15), Mouffe argues that the task for agonistic pluralism is not rational consensus but to 'transform *antagonism* into *agonism*' and to mobilize 'passions towards democratic designs' (ibid., p. 16, original italics). But for agonistic pluralism to work, it requires some form of consensus, or as Mouffe puts it, 'it requires allegiance to the values, which constitute its "ethico-political principles"' (ibid., p. 16). Under conditions of agonistic pluralism, this consensus can only be a 'conflictual consensus', temporary and always subject to more contestation and confrontation, by people with different moral and ethical conceptions.

What appears missing is an account of the *social* dimension of (a multicultural) society, of the substantive aspects of living *together*. The upshot for Islam is that, from the point of view of a Western-based agonistic

pluralism, it is bound to remain a permanent adversary. Notwithstanding Mouffe's anti-essentialist stance, insofar as Islam is understood as involving 'different moral and ethical conceptions', and regardless of how dynamic it is 'internally', it will remain an 'Other', at best equal, but still reified as an adversary. Multicultural society in agonistic conditions appears really as a very unattractive society: one that is full of constant strife and struggle, based on a set of fragile and precarious agreements – indeed, one could question the extent to which such a living arrangement would qualify as a *society*.[3]

Mouffe's only concession is to partly accept the communitarian critique that ethical commitment to shared notions of the good is an integral part of politics. Following Oakeshott, she proposes a reworking based on the notion of *societas*, or civic association focusing on common acceptance of a set of rules and the adoption of 'a specific language of civil intercourse' (1992, p. 233). This is the type of political community possible under conditions of ethical pluralism: what binds people together is 'their common recognition of a set of ethico-political values' (p. 235), which in substantive terms includes the political principles of equality and liberty for all. And this is the condition of possibility for radical democracy: a consensus centring first on allegiance to the constitutive principles of the city/country/republic, and second on acceptance of the modus operandi or the 'grammar' of these principles – in other words, on constitutional patriotism and proceduralism. Mouffe has ended up in the same path as Habermas. For Islam, the result is the same: it either has to play by the rules it did not contribute to, or it will be politically excluded.

Thus, commonality is expressed either as a priori commitment or as temporary alliance for strategic purposes: the reflexive questioning of the political, social, cultural, economic constitution of a society understood in more substantive terms is nowhere to be seen. The question that arises therefore is: is it necessary for radical multicultural democratic politics to lose any sense of a broader and deeper connection and link between (and across and within) communities? Polarized between a uniform consensus and a discordant antagonism, these positions appear unable to create a space for a multiculturalism understood as the creation and safeguarding of difference in the context of life together.

Multicultural radical democracy and (Internet) communication

We may begin this section on the basis of two observations. first, that the view of the political encountered is unnecessarily restrictive: in Habermas, with his insistence on the centrality of reason and consensus,

it is overly formalistic; in Mouffe, with her insistence on the centrality of inherent and irreducible antagonism, it is both formalistic and negative. This restricted understanding has led these accounts to prioritize different elements: Habermas focused on the communicative dimension of the political as primarily entailing reason; Mouffe has looked at communication only in strategic terms, as a means by which hegemony and strategic alliances may be formed and challenged. The second observation therefore concerns the issue of communication: one-dimensional in Habermas, strategic in Mouffe, it requires closer attention if we are to reformulate radical democracy from a multicultural perspective. It will be argued that a different understanding of the political leads to a different understanding of communication and its role in politics, one which we may subsequently use to broaden the political potential of the Internet, and through this, its contribution to radical democratic multicultural politics.

Rather than viewing the political in primarily formal terms, we can opt for a different understanding based on the concept of autonomy. It is in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis that autonomy finds its most elaborated form and acquires a renewed political urgency. Castoriadis (1975/1997a) has presented a forceful historico-political argument regarding the role of autonomy as self-institution: it refers to instances in which a collectivity sets its own laws, and can therefore change or revoke them as it sees fit. This instituting moment for Castoriadis[4] is what characterizes the political. We can therefore adopt a view of the political understood as the domain wherein the instituting power is free to operate and hence as constitutive of/directed by (different types of) society. Insofar as the political remains open to the instituting power, it is characterized by an irreducible reflexivity. Another crucial aspect concerns the requirement that democratic politics is a substantive and ethical politics, that it is concerned not only with establishing the right procedures, but with discussing the 'common good' and with articulating wider commonalities. Democracy, as Castoriadis (1997b, p. 1) has put it, is 'indissociable from a substantive conception of the ends of the political institution'. In this manner, the political, the cultural, and the social domains all take part in the institution of the political, each contributing its own principles: reasoned argument (politics), aesthetic expression (cultural), and reciprocity/solidarity (social).

At the same time, we have learned from agonistic pluralism that societies must be understood as irreducibly plural rather than as united organic entities. A radical democratic society must allow for antagonisms to be voiced or played out. But equally, (multicultural) radical democratic societies must allow for the creation and articulation of

commonalities, not as a priori commitments, nor as strategic alliances, but as outcomes of a common participation in the political. Considering the political as the domain of instituting power takes on board the positive, creative or generative dimension of common life, rather than viewing it as the arbitration and struggle between opposing forces. For multiculturalism this implies the possibility for substantive participation and for questioning existing arrangements; for Islam, it implies the possibility of active involvement in informing discussions of the 'common good'. Any commitment to the democratic principles of equality and liberty will therefore be the outcome of creating common interpretations of these.

Participation in the political requires communication as it is premised on the articulation, expression or contestation of positions. But communication must incorporate the creative aspect of bringing objects into being. This highlights another aspect of agonism, that of performativity: Honig (1995) and Tully (1999) insist on the agonistic understood as the performative element of politics. This performativity is understood as the way of being/doing in the world which generates identities, understandings, connections, and disconnections. Agon also refers to action and acting[5] and through these to performance. Although performance and performativity have been given different elaborations by theorists as diverse as John Austin (1962), Victor Turner (1982), and Judith Butler (1997), all three describe performativity as entailing, first, the (re)iteration of actions/discourses, and second, the implied and/or actual existence of an audience or a public. The latter is particularly significant, as it implies that 'felicitous' performances can only take place in front of a participant public, and moreover, that different audiences lend different slants to the performances.

It is this dimension of the performative as the communicative enactment of politics that is often overlooked in accounts of the Internet and democratic politics. This body of work has provided fascinating insights, capturing at least three important aspects of the Internet/politics relationship: the deliberative dimension, the activist/oppositional element, and the political economic aspect. Work on the deliberative dimension examines the extent to which online activity can be understood as deliberative activity, and the political space of the Internet as a public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001, 2004). Analyses of the activist dimension have contributed to understanding the ways in which the Internet has extended and widened political action and participation (Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Meikle, 2002; Pickerill, 2003). Finally, political economic

studies of the Internet have shown the limitations of a technology operating within a capitalist economic framework (Patelis, 2000; Schiller, 1999). By incorporating the performative dimension of online communication, this work may be enriched through looking at the ways in which the Internet mobilizes and transforms the political domain through the enactment, the bringing into being, of new links, commonalities, understandings and also of separations, divergences, disconnections, and antagonisms. For the study of online activity, attention to performativity has important implications: it implies that the political can come into being in unexpected sites, and through unexpected means; analytically, this requires openness to a variety of online practices, as they may have an important political/performative dimension. Finally, insofar as the performative requires the presence of a public it pays attention to the 'receiving' end of online communicative practices.

Online Islam and multicultural radical democratic politics

Armed with this conceptual vocabulary, we can embark on an analysis of the Internet as it is articulated with Islam,[6] and find the politics it performs. We can ask, how does it create new connections, or re-establishes old ones? How does it separate or divide the world? And ultimately, what is the political meaning of such actions? Through empirical responses to such questions, we may begin to think about actually existing multiculturalism, and its links and contributions to the project of radical democracy.

Given the current *problématique*, the categories that emerge as relevant are society/culture and politics. The analysis can therefore focus on the social and cultural online Islam, concerned with life together and with its online aesthetic/expressive and symbolic dimensions, and political online Islam, concerned with questions of power. This is a starting point, which focuses on dimensions that are particularly pertinent in terms of the multicultural project, a project which includes a safeguarding of difference, as well as participating in the creation of a common life.[7] The analysis looks at these articulations in their online instantiations, using empirical material from a number of sites and Internet formats.[8] The analytical tools include the types and contents of communication, as well as the publics of these.[9] The former two are referred to as communicative formats and seek to incorporate both formal and substantive elements of communication. Together, these aspects

are understood as performative, in bringing into being commonalities and links.

Social/Cultural Islam

We can broadly distinguish six communicative formats in this category: online discussions; blogs; online poems, prose, and pictures; articles on Muslim life; downloads; and dating/marriage sites. The dialogic form of communication is very popular in Muslim websites as witnessed by the many discussion forums; the topics discussed are very broad, from the personal to the political.[10] Online discussions take place among 'equals' – the status of the participants is in principle unknown and ultimately unconnected to the discussion. The style is varied, ranging from simple opinions to complex argumentation. A different style of communication is encountered on Muslim blogs, where bloggers write often extensive commentaries and articles about a range of subjects, and invite readers to respond. Here the communication is instigated by the blogger, who also decides on the themes to be discussed. The more developed blogs have a set of categories, under which they post;[11] there is also an interactive component, as readers can post comments.[12] Both online discussions and blogs cover social and cultural aspects of life, but do so primarily in a dialogical style and from a perspective mostly based on experience. As such they enable the expression and sharing of experiences.

Artistic expression comes in different forms, including poetry, prose, and images. Here, we find poems and prose not only on God, but also on life, love and other human concerns.[13] Pictures, including photographs and drawings are also encountered, with artists posting photographs or other images that they consider poignant and worth sharing – these may be offered as links in websites, as downloads, or as separate photoblogs.[14] These aesthetic and expressive elements are complemented by a more intellectually oriented aspect, found in the publishing of articles on Muslim history and tradition, as well as commentaries and reviews of books and other artistic output.[15] A lot of the more professionally produced websites include articles on aspects of life, and in particular of family life, parenting and married life: the style here is typically didactic.[16] Another communicative format includes the downloads offered in many Muslim sites: one of the most common downloads are flash animations covering a wide variety of topics, some quite complex, but often rendered in a schematic manner[17] – their top-down and rather simplistic style can also be thought as didactic. Additionally, they may be thought as parables, as informal lessons in everyday morality.

Communication in dating sites brings people together quite literally through posting one's details on the relevant dating sites, and/or responding to someone else's details. These sites offer the possibility of getting together for a date, for a prospective marriage, and for friendship.[18]

The discussion/blog formats seem to be the most inclusive ones: in principle anyone can participate, be they Muslim or not. Similarly, the artistic formats, the poems and photographs, are open to all, particularly when they are posted on blogs, and the intellectual commentaries and articles on books: art, 'Islamic' or not, interpellates a general public, as artistic appreciation and intellectual curiosity is not bound to faith or background. This openness is not observed in the remaining formats. The advice articles are addressing those in need of advice, typically understood as women and the young. The extensive and detailed articles on how to deal with husbands and children, as well as the advice to teenagers 'with problems', interpellates a 'dependent' and gendered public. The flash animation files assume an equally patronizing tone, but address a broader Muslim public. However, rather than the intellectual and curious public engendered in articles and poems, this public is constructed as unsophisticated and in need of guidance. Finally, the dating sites address specific persons, who fit certain requirements, set up by those looking for a partner.

The type of connection created through these communicative formats is an important one: the first three formats establish a connection between both Muslims and non-Muslims, and also between those who post information or messages and those who receive it. Crucially this connection is established among 'equals', or rather, it creates equals, in that whoever seeks to participate can do so. Moreover, the artistic format in its aesthetic, expressive and intellectual dimensions brings together people in reflecting upon what they see or read. The artistic format can additionally be understood as connecting 'humanity' in its generality in that it evokes what, according to Hannah Arendt (1958), is unique in human beings: their ability to act on their world beyond the call of nature and biology. Regardless of the extent to which there is agreement or disagreement with, appreciation or not of the artistic output, its online existence generates and invokes a bond.

The theoretical significance of these connections lies in the creation of an online Islam that is open and reflexive, and moreover, co-constructed by all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the Muslim discussion forums and blogs users call for reflection and argument about what Islam is or should be, discuss common experiences, and exchange comments and

opinions on matters of common concern. Through these they construct a common or shared Islam which encompasses a wide variety of experiences and understandings, and which actively participates in the creation of new commonalities – and it should be stressed that commonalities cannot be reduced to agreements: reflecting upon Islam is what is common rather than agreeing on it. This is even more so when it comes to the artistic formats: here the common element is the aesthetic and intellectual contemplation rather than any common appreciation of the works posted online. And the contemplation of Islam as an object of aesthetic and intellectual work is, in turn, what makes it part of the collective human effort to understand and master the world. Crucially, the sociality created here is one revolving around contemplation and reflection – and thus linking people together in a common endeavour. In performative terms, this is precisely the domain in which the creative aspect of the political is more apparent: corresponding to Castoriadis's social imaginary, this common contemplation gives rise to a number of significations that subsequently feed into politics. It is not all good news however: the (re)establishment of a division between Muslims as possessing the truth and non-Muslims as being in error, and between independent (male) believers and dependent women and children points to the creation of an unequal sociality that performs divisions that cannot be overcome as they are based on essentialized differences. But both types of connection and separation remain suspended: they cannot materialize until the publics summoned take on or respond to the commonalities and separations set up by these sites.

Political online Islam

Working with a definition of political Islam as involving power, we can include here all instances concerned with how power is understood, questioned, undermined, directly opposed and, conversely, legitimated, upheld and supported in Islam-related online environments. This broad understanding is limited in practice through focusing on English language sites run and administered by Muslims. Given the transnational orientation and character of online Islam, the analysis has to address power in its cross-and transnational dimensions. Additionally, 'power' is here understood as involving both formal elements linked to governments and states, and more informal elements, linked to the bottom up, but not necessarily democratic, administration of life. It is evident that the social/cultural online Islam has a lot of links to political online Islam. This analytic separation is meant to highlight the ways in

which the administration of life is always caught up with questions of morality, of what is right/just, while the socio-cultural is always caught up in questions of ethics and the good life. The actual difficulty of clearly distinguishing between them points to the impossibility of separating questions of justice (politics) from questions of ethics (culture/society).

The links between the social and the political are evident in the shared communicative formats. Political communicative formats include news, activist sites, and political blogs, as well as explicitly political discussion posts and threads. News is one of the main formats here: this is concerned with developments that refer to or affect Muslims across the world. The global or transnational dimension is evident: the focus is generally on Muslims, and not limited to a particular locality, although the Middle East features prominently.[19] We also find here commentary and opinion articles, as well as readers' comments on these.[20] Activist sites constitute a form unique to this category: we can find a multitude of sites engaged in bona fide activism in support of a variety of issues. These include, for instance, the issue of Palestine, gender and gay rights, and political empowerment of Muslim citizens.[21] Political blogs tend to be concerned with specific political issues, employing the typical blog style of personal observations and experiences, along with general public commentary.[22] Discussion forums are to a significant extent concerned with politics; political themes are typically dominated by Israel and Palestine, and the war in Iraq.[23]

The news format interpellates primarily a Muslim public, and secondarily all those interested in Muslim-related news. The same may be said of blogs, at least insofar as they cover topical aspects. Activist sites, on the other hand, seem to address a politically aware and politically sensitive public – whether this is a Muslim public is left open: the sites do not explicitly exclude anyone, if anything, they solicit everyone's help. Similarly, interest and willingness to participate are the main attributes of those involved in online discussions. Although membership is required for some forums, no one is excluded on the basis of identity – at the same time, some sites state that they will ban those expressing extremist views. Overall, the most important finding here is that the main public is understood primarily as politically active rather than in terms of pre-existing identities.

The addressees and communicative forms indicate that the connections and separations here occur at the 'purely' political level: users are addressed in political-ideological terms, in terms of what they think is right and just. Additionally, online political Islam is expansive,

universalistic; it seeks to persuade or recruit everyone. Nevertheless, it openly designates some as the enemy. These references to enemies (including, among others, Osama bin Laden, George Bush, Zionists, and Islamophobes) demarcate opposing camps and impose an almost Schmittian separation between friends and enemies, in which the latter are opposed and excluded; when they try to get 'in', they are ignored, marginalized, ridiculed or otherwise countered.[24] Political online Islam therefore attempts to build connections and alliances with like-minded people in an open manner: everyone – even 'enemies' are allowed to participate, in the sense that they can post comments, even if in the end their views are openly criticized or countered. As with the social online Islam, what is important here is not the extent of agreement or disagreement, but the overall possibility of encountering others, including 'third parties', 'enemies', or 'adversaries', and engaging with them in various ways.

There is a parallel line of analysis stemming from the mediated news format. Mediated news can be understood as an integral part of (late) modernity (Anderson, 1991; Thompson, 1995). In this sense, this communicative form establishes a common set of concerns and places them in the middle of the community. In this sense, this form of communication first creates a 'common world' (Arendt, 1958) through references to a common set of concerns and second, it summons its political dimension, insofar as reporting on the *actualité* enables the formation of a public opinion (Habermas, 1989). The reference to the public sphere theory is significant, as it flags the issue of citizenship. Following Habermas, news reporting is a prerequisite for the formation of a public opinion in the citizenry, which then legitimizes political decisions. But citizenship implies belongingness to a geographically bound political community, something that clearly needs to be adapted to the transnational forms of belongingness experienced by many Muslims. The political community created or supported by the online news format is not bound by locality. The removal of geographical parameters is not unequivocally positive: losing the political space in which the formation of a public opinion matters may end up creating disenfranchised people, ultimately unable to act. It is here that the relevance of the activist sites becomes apparent: their focus on the specific reinserts locality and political action. This localized political action appears as a necessary complement to the Muslim news sites. Together they enable and galvanize a (not exclusively Muslim) political community to address questions of politics/power, justice and morality. As with the blogs and discussion sites, we must insist that the focus is neither on

agreement nor on disagreement – indeed they are both encountered, and there is no reason at this level to privilege one over the other. Rather, the importance of these sites is that they enable the formation of a political community comprising a set of common concerns and an arsenal of political actions, including voting, boycotting, communicating, informing, as well as creating alliances, consolidating opinions and so forth. The contribution of political Islam online is therefore not its creation of a Muslim public sphere, as commentators have argued (Anderson, 2003; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Mandaville, 2001) – indeed, how are we to understand the complex array of inclusion of Muslim and non-Muslim persons, exclusion of extremists, designation of enemies and adversaries, the personal style of blogs, the rhetoric, overt antagonism and partisanship of activist sites as a public sphere? Instead, we must locate the contribution of these sites in the performative enablement of a political community bound by its interest in matters pertaining to the distribution of power and justice in a globalized world.

Conclusion

These findings point to a complex set of connections and separations performed by online Islam, with important political ramifications. Social online Islam is in many ways the richest, and to this extent the most revealing form of online Islam. It is in this form that Islam online points to the coming together of people (believers or not) in forming a *society*, in the Greek sense of a common way of being: through artistic expression, through discussions, through narratives, people are brought together in common contemplation of Islam. Social online Islam reveals the significant extent to which everyday life is about common contemplation of and engagement with issues relating to life. As such, it must be seen as an integral part of any multicultural project. The links between social and political online Islam show the political relevance of this category: questions of (the good) life are bound to questions of power and the administration of life. Political online Islam points to the need to separate and divide before or in order to create connections and links: to form alliances, one must define who are the friends and enemies. But a parallel step is to consolidate these connections, through contemplation of a set of common concerns about matters to do with power. If social online Islam contributes to the creation of community, political online Islam contributes to the formation of a political

community concerned with the moral and ideologico-political issues of life together.

This co-existence and mutual reliance of connections and separations imply that life together has to incorporate both elements. But perhaps more centrally, the findings here highlight the issue of engagement[25] with the forms of online Islam. In other words, the common contemplation and engagement with Islam appears to create community or a political community insofar as it also contemplates questions of justice and the good life. If a demos is the *sine qua non* for democracy, then we may see democratic politics as extending not only 'forward', to the setting of laws and regulations for life, but also 'backwards', to the formation of the demos, or the political community, which then may generate new understandings of the good life, and find new ways of dealing with injustice. This prioritizes the performative bringing into being of new forms of connection. And this is precisely what we observed in the online forms of Islam: it is through the creation and use of these sites that commonalities and separations are established, questioned, and revised; equally, it is through the contemplation of matters pertaining to Islam and justice that a political community is established; and through these, finally, rules are established, challenged, and modified. These forms might then be understood as involving a politics of enactment, of bringing into being this contemplation or engagement with Islam. For multiculturalism this is crucial since this engagement allows the creation of a new mode of society, not an assimilated or integrated one, nor one of mere association but an alternative society based on being concerned with and about others and involved in contemplation of common futures. This calls for finding new ways of becoming involved in considering the substantive, ethical, moral and ultimately political aspects of life.

However, for these online forms of engagement to be consummated or successfully performed, there must be a public that responds and takes them seriously. This in turn points to the ambiguity of the Internet when thought in performative terms: online communicative forms perform or enact different communities (Muslim, non-Muslim, dependent, contemplating, political, enemy, and so on); yet for these communities to come to being they must respond to these communicative formats: they must, in other words, (mis)recognize themselves as recipients/addressees and then communicate back through whatever means possible, through posting more discussion threads or comments on blogs, or through creating new blogs, or through providing links and so forth. In so doing they can accept, reject, or otherwise negotiate the

communicative forms issued. This first privileges the more interactive communicative formats. Secondly, enactment of such a political community leads to the requirement of a common authoring of these performative communicative formats, which otherwise will remain unconsummated.[26] This is what is involved in the creation of a common world, of a society in its substantive dimension, which can subsequently feed into the political as instituting power – instituting power does not have to be one but in democratic terms it must be (undertaken in) common.

Theoretically, therefore, a multicultural radical democratic project can only exist through the reconciliation of plurality with commonality in substantive terms; as we have seen in Islam online, this is done not through the universalistic appeal of some of its online contents, but rather in the common reflection or contemplation of Islam as entailing both ethical and political features. On the other hand, and this is the first lesson of a performative Islam online, the empirical observation of a multitude of communicative forms complemented by a multitude of substantive contents received and responded to in a multitude of ways, points to the irreducible multiplicity and constant creativity of the social. From a multicultural radical democratic point of view, we must ensure that this dynamism remains; this could be done through actively contesting illiberal, divisive and closed communicative forms, through, in other words, seeking to respond to the communicative calls of Islam online from the point of view of an ongoing reflection on matters of equality, liberty and community. The second empirically discernible lesson of Islam online is that the socio-cultural elements which in fact proliferate in online (Muslim) environments have an ultimate political significance that belies their treatment as politically irrelevant features: a 'community' logically and temporally precedes and subsequently circumscribes a political community. More broadly speaking, the importance of the Internet for radical democracy lies to an extent in the performative creation of a space that allows for engagement with questions of community, equality and liberty; these involve questions of morality, justice, and the good life, undertaken in common but not necessarily in agreement. For these to become politically efficacious necessitates other factors, such as activism, agitation and so forth, but this must be thought as a second and further or parallel step. But the first and necessary step, which we undertook here, was to recognize the political importance of communicative practices and forms encountered in unexpected sites.

Notes

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1. It must be stressed that 'Islam' is not considered a singular category, rather the use of the term here must be thought as a shorthand for all its diverse elements, but at the same time as distinct from 'Christian' and 'secular' understandings of life.
2. This is defined in the following terms: 'Just these action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses' (Habermas, 1996, p. 109). Action norms are understood as 'generalized behavioural expectations' (ibid.).
3. Unlike the Latin etymology of society from *socius*, member or companion, the Greek word *koinonia*, is derived from the word *koino* or common, hence stressing not the associative but the common dimension.
4. Castoriadis (1975/1997a) refers to the radical and social imaginaries as the two creative forces underpinning human history – the political is the reflexive and purposeful activity involving the social imaginary.
5. Agon, action and actor are related through the common root *ag* (Karagiannis & Wagner, 2005, p. 248).
6. Assuming an anti-essentialist perspective, Islam here is considered as multiple and dynamic, but also denoting a historically specific positioning reflecting cultural (including theological), geopolitical (neoimperialist) and postcolonial (relating to agency) parameters.
7. For this reason, extremist, terrorist and clandestine sites are excluded. For different but parallel reasons, the articulation of online Islam with the market is also omitted.
8. The analysis focused on English-language sites. All sites were accessed in the period April–July 2006.
9. This follows Warner's (2002) argument that publics come to existence through being interpellated – in this sense the analysis does not refer to reified pre-existing publics but to those constructed by the texts at hand.
10. In the forum in salaam.co.uk, for example, a post asks about working rights and breaks for prayer, while in the forum in the site mpacuk.org, a post reads: Is hypocrisy a sign that youre [sic] British and integrated?' (http://forum.mpacuk.org/showthread.php?p=81005#post81005). All URLs last accessed 30 August 2006.
11. For instance, Blogistan (www.blogistan.co.uk/blog/) includes about 30 categories of topics including art, media, news, Palestine, politics, the war in Iraq, and work.
12. There is an astonishing range of Muslim blogs – for a developed blogroll see www.sunnisisters.com.
13. See, for instance, www.islamicedfoundation.com/poetry/rabia.htm for classic Islamic poetry, and http://arabicpoems.com/English/ritaw.html for contemporary Arabic poetry by Rita Odeh and other poets.
14. See the blog/website of the Islamic Artists Society: http://islamic-artists.blogspot.com/ includes several paintings. Muslim Cultures is a collaborative

blog posting photographs of 'traditional Islam' (http://muslimcultures.blogspot.com/).

15. For example, Islamonline.net has a wide collection of articles on the history of Islam in Africa, while Sunni sister's blog includes an exchange on interpretations of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, and in particular the character of Shylock. Similarly, Salaam.co.uk offers a set of articles on Muslim history and a set of book reviews, written by various authors, not exclusively Muslim.
16. See for example, http://islamonline.net/English/family/2006/02/article02.shtml for an article about marriage and love and for an article on Muslim teenagers.
17. Islamonline.net offers a set of flash animations on marital love, on working together, on parenting and so forth: http://www.islamonline.net/English/family/INDEX.shtml. The website Islamway.com offers a menu including several flash animation files, including educational ones – see: http://english.islamway.com/bindex.php?section=flashmain.
18. Most sites require membership, see: http://www.muslimmatch.com/ and http://www.muslimmarriageconsultants.com/index.html among many other sites.
19. For instance, Islamonline.com, an Al-Jazeera news site, has two main categories, 'Islamic World News' and 'Middle East News' (http://www.islamoline.com/).
20. Al-Jazeera's opinion section, for example, includes an article by Saskia Sassen, along with comments on the article (http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7258E2EC-9308-46EB-BA3B-C7F7DE5D2734.htm).
21. For Palestine see the electronic intifada network: electronicintifada.net/new.shtml; for gender rights, the International Muslim Rights Association at www.muslimarights.org/; for gay rights, the British-based Imaan site www.imaan.org.uk/; and for 'Muslim empowerment', the UK-based Muslim Public Affairs committee site at www.mpacuk.org/.
22. Examples here include the Angry Arab blog, on politics, war, and the Middle East (angryarab.blogspot.com/); a blog on life in Gaza, run by Imaan, a Swedish Muslim living in Gaza (www.living-in-gaza.blogspot.com); and Laila Al-Haddad's blog about motherhood in Gaza City (www.a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com).
23. See, for example, the Islamic forum site www.gawaher.com and the Sunni forum site www.sunniforum.com.
24. For instance, 'Jay' posted the following on the MPAC site: 'the sooner we put all the muslims on a boat heading east, the sooner we will have peace in the UK and all over europe. The longer we leave it, the closer we will be to the bloodiest civil war of the XXIst centuiy [sic]'; this was promptly countered by: 'Jay is just other dangerous fanatic – ignore him and he'll disapppear [sic]' (http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/1351/33/).
25. This draws upon the work of Connolly (1995) on the ethos of pluralization which revolves around the notion of critical engagement with one's own and other communities.
26. It must be stressed again that 'common' does not always or necessarily imply consensus or agreement – indeed disagreement is both empirically observed and formally possible in the Muslim online environments.

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10

Democracy, Postcolonialism, and Everyday Life: Contesting the 'Royal "We"' Online

M. I. Franklin

Back to the future

Digital technologies have been inducing political and social anxiety for some time now, those demarcating the first, second and, now, third-generation Internet especially. Marxian approaches to this anxiety favour macro-level critiques, whereby the galloping commercialization of all things digital is twinned with neoliberal globalization. With the patchy track record of 'electronic democracy' often serving as a case in point, this version of events underscores the premise that the Internet is *inherently* politically suspect.[1] This undertow of techno-economic determinism also tugs at much *postcolonialist* scepticism of the *ICTs For Development* rhetoric, touted as the latest panacea for endemic disenfranchisement in the so-called Global South. While hyper-corporatization tendencies and evidence of a 'digital divide' lend support to this sort of robust circumspection about the democratic potential of ICTs (information and communication technologies), it is not the whole story. In both cases, it sweeps commentators by other (non-elite, non-corporate, non-Western) designs, uses, and adaptations of digital technologies – those of the Internet especially – which cast another light on the matter. Engaging with the heterogeneous, unpredictable, and hopeful aspects to Internet-mediated interactions, (hyper)texts, forms of *onlineness* unfurling from 'below', renders the Internet's democratic deficit far less inexorable.

The latter proposition is based on a counter-premise that even the most arcane and seemingly intractable of ICT infrastructures, governance set-ups, off-the-shelf software packages with their embedded 'user defaults', and digital gadgetry are socio-historically contingent, not pre-ordained. Current hi-tech economic constellations embody past and

ongoing contestations, which bespeak future options despite appearances to the contrary (Wyatt et al., 2002; Mansell & Silverstone, 1996). This chapter explores how critical – Marxist and postcolonialist – views of the Internet and democracy need to take these contestable aspects to ICTs more seriously. The points and moments where socio-political practicalities on the ground interface with comparable (re)articulations in *cyberspace* trace not only the impositions of neoliberal globalization but also (immanent) 'counter-hegemonic' resistances. In order to connect these, usually non-communicating, critical foci (Marxist democratic strategies,[2] social constructivist approaches to the relationship between social relations and technology, and postcolonial studies) an empiric-analytical framework that is practice oriented is put to work. By investigating evidence of the 'practice of everyday life' (Certeau, 1980; 1984; 2002[3]) on and through the Internet – online – in the first instance and, in the second, by de-structuring notions of 'the' Internet with respect to how ordinary – everyday – uses, practices, and productions online render determinist accounts of the Internet's negative relationship to Western liberal assumptions about democracy problematic. The online-to-offline comings and goings of non-elite, atypical (non-white, non-Western) Internet practitioners in *postcolonial cyberspaces* help substantiate the 'double movement' implied here.

The first of these movements is the incorporation of Michel de Certeau's approach to (political) practice with radical democratic strategies. Certeau, a French social theorist from the *soixante-huitard* generation was a 'polymath who practised an interdisciplinarity that is often espoused but rarely performed' (Highmore, 2002, p. 63) with a politically trenchant conceptualization of everyday life. For this thinker, '*le quotidien*' is not only bounded by Euclidian spaces of top-down power but is also grounded in mobile spaces-in-the-making, 'co-constituted' interrelations of daily movements and activities, and inventive socio-cultural (re)production. This motility and creativity indicates polyglot proclivities for protest, refusal, and resistance to both banal and theatrical practices of official powers-that-be. This sort of everyday *maquis* 'insinuates itself everywhere, silently, almost invisibly . . . through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order' (Certeau, 2002, p. 65). The perspicacity of Certeau's formulation to the 'structure/agency' problems faced by activists organizing against an indefatigable capitalism lies in his recognition that, despite the effectiveness of techno-economic power in curtailing effective change, the utterances and practices of those

who are subjected to various dominations also show how societies, communities, groups can, and do refuse to be completely subsumed by the 'grids of "discipline"' (ibid., p. 66). This insight is vital to any prescient radical democratic research ethics and strategizing, the inclusion of more, rather than less, complexity. Conceptual, methodological, and practical difficulties are the political heart of the matter, not a strategic impediment or conceptual irrelevance (ibid., pp. 72–3; Certeau, 1997b, pp. 3–4): for 'plurality is not the phenomenon to be explained, but the starting point of the analysis' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 140).

The second movement links this approach to what goes on, gets produced, literally and figuratively, in *postcolonial cyberspaces* – those peopled by Pacific Island communities and their diasporas in this case. Entry is through two pioneering portals, the *Pacific Forum* (1994–2001) and the *Polynesian Café* (1996-present), populated and maintained by Pacific Islanders, but not exclusively. The focus here is a reconstruction of a major recurring theme about democracy from their best-known, hyperlinked 'serious discussion forums', the *Kava Bowl* and the *Kamehameha Roundtable*. Most participants live abroad, in New Zealand, Australia, and the USA for the most part.[4] The organizational style, cumulative content, demographics, and *onlineness* characterizing these 'online traversals' redress the above lacunae in postcolonialist and Marxist *theory* in several ways. First, the interwoven layers of manifest – (hyper)textual – content and meaning-making produced, combined with their formal (digital and consensual) organization, and comportment of those who navigate them, challenge received wisdoms about democratic norms, in political practice and as open – public – exchanges of opinion. Second, the richness, polyvalence and 'multivariateness' (Clark, 1999, p. 14) of Pacific Island *online* practices and the ups and downs of online-to-offline positioning, where practitioners continually negotiate their (democratic) right to their *own* utterances, to traverse on-the-ground and online communities on their own terms, challenge exclusionary democratic praxis along with determinist, monistic views of 'the' Internet.

Incorporating the innumerable ways in which the Internet is 'made' and remade in ordinary applications and uses can inform radical and postcolonial democratic *practice* in productive ways. How people 'make do', in Certeau's terms and thereby subvert and 'poach' from the 'dominant economic order' (Certeau, 2002, p. 65) renders ICT uses and (re)designs as mobile, translocal interactions where techno-economic meaning-makings and R&D imperatives, based on software–hardware power constellations, more malleable, more negotiable. Locating and

working with the spontaneous and indeterminate operations currently online dovetails with postcolonialist and radical democratic projects' insistence that polysemy, multiplicity, and indeterminacy are integral to democratically inclusive horizons. Getting under the skin (behind the screens) of everyday *cyber*spatial practices opens up unforeseen possibilities for mobilization, alliance-building, and solidarity in the face of the triumvirate of neoliberalism, corporate ICTs, and globalization. Any 'antagonisms' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, pp. 105, 113–14, 122–7) that emerge can be more productively addressed: online, on-the-ground, and where they interface. In line with this focus on practice – 'the "making" in question' (Certeau, ibid.) and turning up of the volume for silenced voices, I cover the empirical substance first. I then return to the conceptual delineations underpinning the empirical material; first what I mean by *postcolonialism*, and second, a brief re-excavation of Certeau's thought. The aim here is to indicate how his conceptualization of practice, the everyday, reflexive research ethics, and, by extrapolation, 'democracy' as radical political critique is pertinent to the question animating this volume, as I see it, at least. The final section recapitulates with an eye to further reflection and possible actions.

Contesting the 'royal "we" online

Pacific Island diasporic populations are clustered in Western urban centres; when not, Internet access is mostly (and very unevenly) from Pacific Island urban centres, Apia, Pago Pago, Honolulu, Suva, and Nuku'alofa (Franklin, 2004, pp. 5–11, 25–8, 64–70). Since the Web's early days, second- and third-generation Pacific Islanders growing up elsewhere have been interacting online (with and without pre-existing on-the-ground relationships). Pacific Islanders (PI) websites have pioneered open, accessible, and relatively inclusive spaces for younger generations to observe community and national geographies, participate in newer, Internet-based ones and thereby co-create their own sorts of postcolonial Pacific traversals. They interact according to the 'moral economies' that, over time, have come to characterize these cyberspaces' moderating styles, which underpin leaderships' accountability to online – and offline – constituencies, ground-rules that reaffirm as well as countermand (Christian) mores in Pacific Island communities, overseas or 'back home' (ibid., p. 168 passim; Morton, 1999).

The Tongan-focused *Kava Bowl* (1994–2001) discussion forum saw many intense debates about Tongan politics, debates which articulate the contentiousness of Western-style democratic norms and institutions

for postcolonial, non-Western cultures. Such specifically Tongan debates also occurred in the Samoan-based *Kamehameha Roundtable* and other 'Poly' or 'PI' Internet forums, and they still do.[5] Recurring altercations about what democracy means for Tonga, a constitutional monarchy where socio-political dissent has been tightly controlled, were amongst the longest and densest *Kava Bowl* discussions. They articulate eloquently how democracy is very much 'a multivalent concept with not only political, but also cultural, ideological, moral and even emotional connotations. . . . [that] may have different meanings in different cultural contexts' (van Meijl, 1998, p. 391). Explicitly political threads intertwine with other themes germane to these forums: traditional/modern sex-gender roles, (homo)sexuality, Christianity, 'transnational' identity-formation based on inclusiveness rather than 'ancient' or latter-day (gang) rivalries, and the behaviour of the younger 'baggy pants brigade' online and offline (Franklin, 2004, p. 75 passim, p. 136 passim). That said, other social and political issues of interest to (diasporic) Pacific Island communities also figure, splicing through those examined here (for example the 2000 US election, political suffrage in Samoa, Hawaiian sovereignty, the Iraq wars, indigenous rights, and 9/11). In formal – software interface – terms, the manifest content is rendered as multi-layered, textually hyperlinked 'discussion threads' wending their way on-screen in shorter (days) to longer (months) time-spans, a decade in all to date (ibid., pp. 207–12).

Postcolonial articulations of democracy

> The people who support the democratic movement [in Tonga] love the country and the people just as much as those opposing the movement. . . . you're assuming that we'll replace our Custom and our Culture with Democratic rights. That assumption is wrong, of course, because. . . . these rights are weaved into the fabric of our society, it identifies who we are as human beings, and true democracy will only bring out the best in it . . . the rights of the people, that is at the centre of the Democratic Movement.
>
> (Tokoni Mai, in NINJA, 12/05/99)[6]

This quote encapsulates four discernable 'seams' in the weave of the threads' thematic fabric. The first concerns the legitimacy of Tonga's incumbent political rulers. Tonga, a 170 island archipelago in the South Pacific that straddles the international date line, inscribes aristocratic rule – 'noble blood' – into the daily running of the country.[7] This seam begins and ends with positionings about whether Tonga is a benign

autocracy, with one or two bad apples whose 'right to succession' should be reviewed accordingly, or a nepotistic political system which needs wholesale revamping. Amidst more moderated calls that greater *participation* be granted to non-nobles – 'commoners', those loyal to the ('Royals' and) status quo reject the assumption that Western-style representative democracy is self-evidently superior to Tonga's aristocratic model. By this reckoning, change threatens the 'traditional way of life', this 'Tongan Way' being inseparable from the socio-political power of the Tongan royal family and nobility. Critics, online and on the ground, point to endemic economic and environmental vulnerability, foreign aid dependence, and poor living standards as evidence that there are

> 2 sets of rules in Tonga. One for the King and his "nobles" and one for the people of Tonga.
>
> (OneTongan, in Ikani 8/06/99)

The second seam traces positions on the implications political reform might have for Tongan society, Tongan-ness at large. Any constitutional change, for opponents and advocates alike, lie at the heart of traditional 'adherence to chiefly and royal successions' (KBAdmin, 08/02/98) that has defined the socio-political landscape since the 'colonial encounter' and, arguably, before. All interventions along this seam furnish their (counter-) arguments with claims about Tongan exceptionalism, that Tongan political conflicts are not comparable to those of other small island states in the Pacific (Samoa and Fiji for instance) and, more poignantly, how the Kingdom of Tonga was not formally colonized (membership of the British Commonwealth being regarded as a Tongan initiative). In any case, democratic reform, if any, has to be home-grown. The intricacy of these positions is reiterated below by a 'pro-democracy' supporter, accessing the Kava Bowl from Tonga:

> Our situation is DIFFERENT. This is a discussion between Tongans. . . . This love of the country doesn't necessarily means that you have to accept what the Government is doing especially if it is not right. Love of the country can also be taken to mean changing the way the Government is operating.
>
> (Tokoni Mai, op. cit.)

These two seams do not denote mutually exclusive positions, for declared Royalists have always been part of the *Tongan Human Rights and Democracy Movement* (THRDM).[8] These cross-cutting positionings are articulated as content in two ways: when pro-status quo/royalists living

away from Tonga are pitted against pro-change supporters and when explicit references are made to (thereby overlapping other threads about) traditional/modern sex-gender roles in Tongan culture – roles that accord first-born women in Tongan extended family structures a higher rank even as such privileges are not translated into equivalent status or authority in public forums on the ground.[9] These realms are dominated by males (of titled rank). Such practical limitations in offline scenarios, and their contestation by younger, urban-based and/or diasporic generations, are countermanded online by the prominence of not only numerous female but also non-noble male voices in the discussions.

The third seam traces a general disapproval of Cabinet Ministers' performances in office. Much of the pro-democracy advocates' political success has drawn on longstanding discontent over continual corruption scandals, blatant nepotism in the civil service coupled with royal appointees' poor performance.[10] The weakening of the nobility's once unassailable socio-economic clout over the last twenty years has eroded their ability to provide material sustenance to, and so elicit political allegiance from their respective communities of *me'avale* – 'commoners' (Hau'ofa, 1992). The government's brusque treatment of prominent opponents (also participants in Internet discussions) is also food for debate. For those advocating *radical* – constitutional – changes, starker cases of political repression, nepotism, and corruption simply prove the unaccountability of unbridled aristocratic privilege. That said, not only incumbents' performances are addressed. Prominent pro-democracy activists themselves, members of a loose and changing coalition at the best of times, have also been put in the hot seat. If some of these politicians and intellectuals are not being taken to task for being abroad, their integrity and commitment to effective change is openly questioned online, disputed and defended accordingly.

The fourth seam traces the murmurings of colonialism's political economic ramifications in the whole (South) Pacific region. It traces Pacific peoples' various understandings of democracy – as principles of self-determination, indigenous sovereignty, human rights, land rights – for postcolonial and/or global times, vis-à-vis experiences and views on (impositions of) capitalist political economies and Christianity in the islands. Contemporary indigenous political movements differ widely in their readings of these colonial pasts vis-à-vis 'ancient' notions of socio-economic differentials let alone how these are to be redressed in the neoliberal, globalizing present, those of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Hawaii being two prominent cases in point. Defences of Tonga's (relatively recent) 'status-quo', where appeals are made to the integrity of

'pre-contact' socio-cultural hierarchies, are dismissed by opponents as reactionary essentialism propagated by nostalgic ex-pat Tongans. In the words of a prominent Tongan social critic, this argument is based on a 'romantic neo-traditionalism championed by those who are reaping the juiciest fruits that the world capitalist economy gives. These champions tend to wail by the banks of the River of Babylon and proclaim undying devotion to what they have abandoned' (Hau'ofa, [1988]1995, p. 165).

Be that as it may, the intensity and longevity of these political debates indicate more than finger-twitching, mouse-clicking parochialisms or bombastic 'long-distance nationalism' taking advantage of Web-based facilities. The intricacy of the discussions *in toto*, the way they are (self-) moderated, permitted to unfold in relative freedom online, albeit with intimately connected to events and community networks on the ground, articulate some important realities for diasporic communities. Communities that are living as citizens of, and as 'a minority of a minority' in Australia, New Zealand, or the USA, ostensible meritocracies in which socio-economic disadvantage, covert and overt racial discrimination, 'under-performance' in education, employment and health indices impinge on participants' daily lives. These 'oppressions of the present' recall how access to the democratic bounties of individualistic, consumer societies is not self-explanatory, least of all for (ethnic, sexual, religious) minorities. So whether the Tongan political model is adequately democratic in itself is as important as to whether or not its current malaise signals a deeper 'democratic deficit'. A fine line perhaps but an important one for participants nonetheless. Political dissent 'Tongan-style' bespeaks contending options for the local and translocal – 'global' – horizons for inter/action characterizing (postcolonial) Pacific politics.

Online-to-offline rearticulations

How all this is rendered at the interface of online and offline domains traces the inner and outer contours of democratic inclusion or exclusion. Individual standpoints (re)articulate political debates to other, more personal threads about what it means to be 'Polynesian', a 'Pacific Islander', who is also 'American', a 'New Zealander' or 'Australian', of 'mixed race' or married to a Pacific Islander. Threads about 'my own identity' is a favourite theme for younger participants especially, who take the chance offered by the relative impunity of the 'Pacific Islands Online' to come to terms with the empowering and disenfranchising aspects of multiple axes of identity-formation, nationality and, in an essentializing world political context, race/ethnicity when read through 'culture'. These interrelated themes and the Internet in the making they

underwrite are not straightforward by any means. Contradictions and non-sequiturs are an integral element to how the cumulative content is (re)articulated in online-to-offline ways. As discussion threads unfold, overlapping and antagonistic 'subject-positions' emerge, accruing according to class, rank and status, gender hierarchies, diasporic demographics, generational differences in language and (online) comportment, (re)articulations and (re)positionings that constitute the content and onlineness of these everyday 'cyber-patchworks'.

Because no one line of division can be strictly drawn in the actual argumentation of either pro-royalists/status-quo or pro-royalist/pro-change protagonists, explicit expressions of geographical situation (at-home or abroad), self-designations (commoner or nobility, pro- or anti-royalty), in the message or by way of nicknames, provide clues instead. Two broad subject-positions crisscross and countermand one another along the way, *situated experience* and online-to-offline *inter/subjectivity*. Food for debate in its own right, this situated-ness evokes more than a participant's physical access point, (lack of) material benefits, or social status. It is a prescient demarcation line that operates on and for all sides of the debate. Where – who – one is, or isn't, matters. It impacts on how much, or if, forum moderators (the 'KBAdmin' or 'Polycafe') intervene during the more heated polemic, or to curtail 'flaming'. They also inform the contribution – acknowledged and dismissed – of regular *palangi* (non-Pacific Island) participants to the manifest content and co-moderation of the forums (Franklin, 2004, pp. 130–1). Several angles to how the subject-positions at stake actually operate bear highlighting.

First, reasons for leaving Tonga in the first place relate to, second, references to multiply located 'oppressions of the present' (Certeau, 1980, p. 7):

> My parents are from Tonga and I was born and raised in the United States. . . . I just wish that the people that ALWAYS have something negative to say about Tonga and it's government, would DO something instead of showing off their fancy education and expansive vocabulary . . . I know there are TONS of Tongans out there who are helping themselves and others in their community and they're not doing it by whining and complaining on an Internet forum . . .
>
> (Observer-MT, in Ghost 05/03/99)

Third is where this sort of situated-ness is more of a tear in the fabric than a seam. Namely, just how 'relevant' are the viewpoints of diasporic participants growing up in Los Angeles, Sydney, or Otara (New Zealand)

to Tonga's political conundrums? Whatever the response, ex-pat input and demographics are grist to the mill in debates where diasporic and 'at-home' participants regularly challenge each other's point of view. For those diasporic posters objecting to change in the status quo, the perception of relative privilege vis-à-vis those living in the islands, leaves them open to the aforementioned accusations of 'armchair nationalism', further complicated by the fact that, officially, Tonga does not permit dual citizenship (there are notable and noble exceptions to this rule though), whence the need for ex-pat 'regulars' to extrapolate on their multiple, physical, and socio-economic geographies. For instance:

> I am NOT a U.S. citizen. I still proudly hold my Tongan passport and will continue to do so. While I am a staunch liberal Democrat here in the States, I also understand that Tonga is a completely different setting, with historical circumstances contrasting to the United States. Thus, whatever liberal views I may have here, may not be so right in the Kingdom. As for any so-called motivation to preserve my own sanctity in Tonga, I'm afraid that is simply not so because I do NOT live in Tonga despite my citizenship.
>
> (Meilakepa, in George Candler 9/02/99)

As diasporic Tongan communities have fractions that are as fiercely loyal to the Tongan monarchy as those urging a constitutional curbing of royal power, being an 'ex-pat' is also becoming important for all political platforms in Tonga of late. Ex-pats' situations abroad uneasily mesh with socio-economic networks of allegiance (*kavenga*), which flow to and from Tongan noble lineages within and beyond the islands. So, a fourth angle is how standpoints are informed by benefits and obligations that come from (birthright) privileges and *kavenga* obligations, for women and/or men with 'royal blood' vis-à-vis those without. These gender-class-status-'blood-line' loyalties provide material and symbolic sub-texts to arguments for democratic change or, conversely, democratic preservation of the status quo. They are also topics in their own right.

Fifth, in Tonga where, until recently, there has been a general reticence in expressing public criticism of the government (viz. the Royals), the outspokenness and relative demographic diversity of online interactions are in stark contrast to those permitted offline, as is the unedited nature (with moderators keeping a watchful eye) of the sharper, personalized interventions – as written text. The extensive use of optional anonymity brings with it both protection and opportunities for participants who are

aware of the 'social and political inducements to staying silent in public about this matter' (voiceless, in Ikani, op. cit.). Remembering that a certain amount of heated rhetoric is part and parcel of any intense political debate – particularly those around human/indigenous rights and freedom of speech, regarding these threads as expressions of a simple dichotomy between traditionalists and modernizers would belie their online intricacy and that of the (post)colonial Pacific at large. As many participants insist all along the political spectrum reconstructed here, Tonga is already, by definition, a democracy. Maintaining or radically altering the political status quo is, for all sides, a question of 'cultural survival' (Helu, 1999, pp. 10–17) then, a tricky balancing act between social stability, economic autonomy, and self-determination for a small island state dependent on foreign aid and remittances and with a large part of its (younger) populace living overseas. Given multilateral institutions' record of impositions of (neoliberal) structural adjustment/good governance criteria on aid-dependent economies, the democratic implications of economic 'reforms' are anything but self-explanatory. Suffice it to say that the jury is still out.

Summing up, Pacific traversals online have unfolded in the face of 'glocal' political economic stratagems in the region, those of *ICTs for Development* included. They persist by virtue of people's commitment over the years to organize and moderate the comings and goings that shape PI cyberspaces. In so doing they (re)articulate practices and experiences of inter/subjectivity which are prefaced on moving in and belonging to several places, cultures, ethnicities, and nation-states simultaneously. With respect to 'democracy' per se, online-to-offline wrangles over the alleged 'democratic deficit' of an incumbent regime are reminders of the multivalent meanings, historical particularities, and psycho-emotional investments that constitute any democracy. Because they have been unfolding in open-access cyberspaces, where offline social controls and gender–power relations can be bypassed to a certain extent, the translocal nature of these deliberations connect (trans)local particulars to broader debates about democracy, governance, and accountability in a hyper-liberal era. When Pacific Island communities come together on the World Wide Web, everyday experiences of discrimination and their ideals for the future, from inside and outside communities, start to mix and mingle in new ways. Paying them due attention reveals some radically pluralistic renderings of democracy-in-practice (not just in theory) as participants persistently exercise and (re)negotiate their own sense of agency, their own sense of socio-cultural and historical change, their own interlacing sense of

self- and community-identities, and accompanying forms of exclusion. They use the Internet enthusiastically and astutely, opening up their own (cyber)spaces by poaching – '*braconner*' (Certeau, 1980) – from available (proprietary and open-source) software and infrastructural access, with and without formal IT training. A 'postcolonial politics of representation' is emerging as practitioners become more cognisant of the intersection between these cyber-corners and the wider stage offered by the World Wide Web writ large (Franklin, 2004, pp. 187–92). For lined up against these everyday online practices, offline lives, and their techno-social specificities is a host of powerful vested interests looking to control and steer the Internet, and the postcolonial Pacific, in other, non-democratic directions.

On terms

The exegesis above needs some theoretical substance in light of the problematic animating this volume and the task taken on by this contribution, the actual and potential relationship between ICTs – the Internet – and radical democratic strategies. Time now to elucidate the term *postcolonialism*, and the relevance of Michel de Certeau's practice theory for critical theory and research into, and for (postcolonial) cybertimes.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is used here as shorthand for multifarious voices contesting the authoritarianism of Western knowledge-making practices and political-economic institutions, as rendered in colonies especially. They are approaches that look to make the lives, ideas, and cultural practices of other – 'subaltern' – populaces visible and audible. At the risk of over-simplifying the diverse and rich literature that comprises postcolonialism, let alone contentions about key terms and appropriate political responses, various standpoints share a desire to redress Anglo-American-European (viz. Western) presumptions of cultural superiority, 'civilized' singularity, and democratic prowess.[11] Likewise for the cherished assumption that *Western* contestations, experiences of free speech, equal rights, secularism, universal suffrage, scientific rationality, and accompanying institutions (and their exportation to the colonies) are inherently superior, even when the best of intentions are sullied by imperialism's violence. As a challenge for and by peoples subjected to (in)direct colonial rule, postcolonial theory, research, and mobilizations look to debunk such conceits by reconstructing the

external (institutional) and internal (through socialization) impositions of a very lop-sided 'social contact' between colonizer and colonized. By the same token, postcolonialism also focuses on reciprocity, various forms of 'postcolonial learning', non-reducible (hybrid) identities, bilateral knowledge exchanges, inter- and *intra*cultural dynamics that arose from but also continue to co-shape the colonial 'encounter'. This is not a passive, totally abject subject/subjectivity, but an incompletely subjugated, active *and* immanent agency (Beier, 2002; Franklin, 2007; Krishna, 2002; Ling, 2002; Smith, 1999). Postcolonial subjects are actors who raise their voices and intervene, whether as the 'Empire writing back' in Western literature, as independence struggles, or as civil/indigenous rights platforms staking their own claims to the aforementioned precepts of liberty, equality, and humanity. For lines critical of *capitalist* social relations (working within Marxism while looking to undercut concomitant conceits), colonialism's export of (proto) industrial capitalism, commodity fetishes, and liberal consumer-individualism have manifested themselves *in situ* as endemic socio-economic impoverishment, which has gone hand in hand with racialization, exoticization, and – for Muslim minorities today – demonization of the 'Other'.[12]

In practical terms, postcolonialism has to balance on the pin-heads of multiplex and singular axes of sex/gender, race/ethnicity, religion, caste and/or class, in conjunctures of domination as well as liberation, in ICT-mediated as well as non-digital/traditional scenarios. This is the point of intersection with practice theory/theories of everyday life (Ortner, 1996; Highmore, 2002) and Marxist projects that integrate polysemy, polyphony, and indeterminacy into democratic 'imaginings' pertinent to 'postmodernizing' times. What still needs to happen is to take all these critiques of the myth of one transcendent subjectivity into the Internet's cyber-lands. Here, too, postcolonial societies, and their diasporas, are present, in action as they do business, converse and argue with people, accessing (albeit in different measures) the Net close-by (next-door even) or from further away. Finally, postcolonialism, and derivative terms, amount to more than armchair, ivory tower criticisms of 'The West'. It also denotes an indeterminate historical conjuncture. For many parts the world, the 'post' in *post*colonial has barely arrived. When it has, the 'colonial' dimensions are still going strong.

Michel de Certeau and postcolonial cybertimes

This brings me to how Certeau's work is pertinent to comprehending Marxist and postcolonial contestations of the 'royal "we"' wherever these

may be found. Michel de Certeau's theoretic-practical project, steeped in the socio-political ferment of the 1960s and mixed successes of its aftermath, takes Michel Foucault's *leitmotiv* – the productive ubiquity of an abstract 'microphysics of power' – into ordinary lives (Certeau, 2002, pp. 66–8). Intent upon locating counter-intuitive, counter-factual evidence and experiences 'from below', his work is a conscious 'appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with the other (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations' (ibid., pp. 66; Certeau, 1997a; 1997b). He is interested in the variety of inter/personal politics inherent in the inventiveness – the making – of everyday life through constituent practices (reading, writing, talking, walking, and so on) because he wants to understand how 'the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices' (Certeau, 2002, p. 68). That said, Certeau's approach and lexicon need rehabilitation for both leftist thought and cybertimes. First, because of the sanitizing of the politically subversive nature of his project since his lifetime, for example, apolitical renditions of his (own admitted) 'euphemistic' portrayal of 'consumption' (ibid., p. 64). Second, there is a tendency to see the complexity of this stress on the 'ingeniousness' of bottom-up everyday practices *versus* intransigent top-down power (ibid., p. 66) as either an overly romanticized notion of the quotidian or an either/or conceptualization of (countermanding) power per se.[13]

Bearing these caveats in mind, three strands in Certeau's work pertain to how postcolonial cyberspatial practices, including their offline interfacings, resonate with radical democratic projects. The first is his *open-ended* and stubbornly optimistic politicization of everydayness, comprised of spatial practices of non-elite, unofficial displacements and places, psycho-emotional allegiances, utterances, wisdom, and competencies. The second strand follows more familiarly pessimistic analyses – how power-brokers and their representational regimes and economies discipline, control, or 'create' consent; democratic (re-)empowerment is not ready-made in short. A third strand is his *psychodynamic* understanding of inter/subjectivity; how consensual and resistive mechanisms operate and are rendered in social structures, power hierarchies, and gender relations. People encounter and counteract themselves and one other as individuals, family members, as (multiple) citizens, and community members. Not consecutively but simultaneously. Sometimes in unison and many times not. They do so at conscious and unconscious levels of re-cognition, which contradict, overlap each other, dissipate, and coalesce within lifetimes and through generations.

All in all, everyday practices, ordinary lives, and utterances are not footnotes to the grand narratives of domination and liberation. They are co-constituents of the same in that such practices 'compose a "culture"' (2002, p. 64; 1997a; 1997b), including the obvious 'oppression of the here-and-now' and the many ways in which oppressions are circumvented or undermined by dispersed practices of counter-production that, by force of circumstance, manage to 'poach from' and 'skim off' what established orders have on offer (ibid., p. 6 passim; 1984, p. 199 passim).

In this sense, Certeau's more upbeat take (in contradistinction to Foucault, Bourdieu, and Lefebvre) on everyday practices/everyday life (Certeau, 1984, p. 45 passim) speaks to postcolonialist and Marxist sensibilities in today's cybertimes. First, the 'proliferation of stories and heterogeneous operations that make up the patchworks of everyday life' (Certeau, 1980, p. 20) comprises and (re)articulates an indeterminate amount of textual-and-spatial practices for consideration; written, read and spoken word, listened-to (hyper)texts, physical and virtual movements cumulatively 'draw' the manoeuvring room of ordinary and extraordinary (cyber)spaces; by those who write, read, speak, move in, and out of them. Second, the various 'politics of representation' at stake in the submersion or foregrounding of non/powerful narratives also hold for cyberspatial 'patchworks of everyday life' as well. The power differentials – politics – lie in the gap between those who have and can exert power and those who can, or do not. Somewhat dualistically, by his own admission, Certeau conceptualizes this 'gap' as the push-and-pull of power elites' *strategic* capabilities vis-à-vis the 'feints and dodges' of non-elites' *tactical* exigencies. All the more reason, then, to pay attention to the latter, for if

> it is true that the grid of "discipline" is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also "miniscule" and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what "ways of operating" form the counterpart . . . of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. . . . [T]he goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline".
>
> (Certeau, 2002, p. 65)

There is a sense of urgency in this project to 'restore to everyday practices their logical and cultural legitimacy, at least in the sectors – still very limited – in which we have at our disposal the instruments necessary to account for them' (ibid., p. 67). Quixotic as this may appear, the point he is making is that everyday articulations/articulations of informal 'tactics of practice' (ibid., p. 68) resist total control precisely because they are inter/hypertextual written-spoken polyphonies. Rather than cause for despair though, this state of affairs can extend the horizon of possibility, pointing to openings into other ways of apprehending political praxis. This demystification – democratization – of political agency in an Internet-mediated age also means taking online practices seriously, for their own sake but also in order to account for the unpredictability, complexity and, thereby, 'essential instability of political spaces' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 151). In commercialized, capitalist-enclosed cyberspace (acceptance of) the 'multiplication of political spaces and the prevention of the concentration of power in one point are, then, preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society' (ibid., p. 178).

Another pertinent point is the research and organizational ethics bound up in this approach, the creation of modes of inquiry that 'speak up' as opposed to 'speak down' (Certeau, 1984, pp. 130, 222, n. 28; Franklin, 2004, pp. 56 passim, 198 passim). The difficulties for positivist or analogue inculcated modes are duly noted, for 'this kind of research is complicated by the fact that these practices themselves alternately exacerbate and disrupt our logics' (Certeau, 2002, p. 67). Cognisant of the hi-tech dimensions to late capitalism, Certeau notes that it is more than a question of harping on about exploitative

> procedures of production: in a different form, it concerns as well the status of the individual in technical systems, since the involvement of the subject diminishes in proportion to the technocratic expansion of these systems. Increasingly constrained, yet less and less concerned with these vast frameworks, the individual detaches himself [sic] from them without being able to escape them, and can henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them, to rediscover, within an electronicized and computerized megalopolis, the 'art' of the hunters and rural folk of earlier days.
>
> (ibid., p. 73)

In sum, the practical consequences of this approach to socio-cultural and political economic realities for both critical research modes and political strategizing is that not only do implicit terms of reference,

organizational and empirical demarcations need to be addressed but also time and patience invested in order to locate and then trace movements that are co-creating (cyber)space 'as a practised place'. This 'other' understanding of (cyber)space as intrinsically social – relational and mobile, not fixed in the Cartesian space-and-time, is integral to Pacific Island and other non-Western social and physical geographies as well. If one accepts that 'any account is an account of a journey – a spatial practice' (Certeau, 1984, p. 115) then there is all the more need for radical democratic strategies that can account for multiplex online-to-offline traversals.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter's contribution to thinking through the relationship between radical democracy and the Internet with respect to postcolonialist and 'Certeauian' lines of inquiry vis-à-vis postcolonial traversals online, three questions have been at stake. First, how can reconstructed 'democratic imaginings' critical of (hyper) capitalist social relations better deal with hi-tech research and development trajectories? Second, how and where does this project resonate with postcolonialist critiques of colonialist derivations, and corruptions, of democracy and technological 'progress'? Third, how can both deal with a shared tendency to overly determinist understandings of ICT, the Internet, and corollary terms?

To recapitulate this chapter's argument then, Internet forums for the postcolonial diasporas and peoples of the Pacific islands of Tonga, Samoa, *inter alia*, offer both empirical and theoretical responses to the above. First, in their (re)articulation of the inner and outer tensions of everyday 'tactical operations' vis-à-vis the strategic manoeuvrings of 'traditional' and more recent power constellations, they demystify intra- and intercultural reifications of frameworks for thought and action that would nail inherently mobile axes of inter/subjectivity like sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class/status to the floor. Hospitable Pacific Island websites such as these (including less accommodating moments and discussion themes), together with other postcolonial/diasporic online communities, underscore how practices of everyday life are cogent to effective radical democratic praxis. The 'antagonisms' that may emerge are intrinsic – not anathema – to democracy in the fullest, inclusive sense of the term. The tenacity, innovativeness, cumulative content, and innovativeness of these (cyber)spatial practices confront both radical and postcolonialist democratic projects with the urgency to get online and 'get down' (from various high-horses for a start).

The de-essentializing work achieved by both endeavours in traditional theoretical terms can then fully engage with the cyber-terms and cyber-generations of today.

Postcolonial and everyday (cyber)spatial practices are also indispensable to equitable – democratic – ICT/Internet future designs. So, second, this requires deeper rethinking of how 'technology' is conceptualized along with how evidence of corroborating, and counter-intuitive, renditions is based on ethically reflexive and grounded (viz. ethnographically inspired) research, from the ground up. After all, the Internet is here, has been for a while and 'we' all are beholden to its variegated functions, opportunities, and conveniences. Exchanging technologically determinist imagings of ICTs for critical constructivist ones does not mean the relinquishing of one's critical faculties though. Circumspection about the latest hi-tech gadgets, commercial claims, security alarms, or the gender-power quotient of Internet access and content requires a bird's eye-view of the broader techno-political economy at stake. Nevertheless, political dismissals of all things Internet – as with all things everyday – can overlook the democratic potential, the gaps that quiver and shimmer between ordinary people's ICT uses and interfaces and those that constitute the 'glocal' strategies of ownership and control more familiar to left critiques of latter-day ICT and media conglomerates. There are multiple Internets already in operation. Despite the tendency (and ability) of political-commercial vested interests to hog the limelight, ordinary and non-Western Internet practitioners have a formative part to play in how, for, and by whom Internets – with the plural form staking its own claim here – are (to be) put in place.

Third, these (re)articulations require that radical democratic theory and research, the practice theories of Certeau and his contemporaries, and like-minded postcolonialist critiques of hyper-liberal, Internet venture-capitalism to intervene by re-politicizing the Internet, not only in terms of a dominating techno-economics or divisive architecture but also in terms of contesting social relations, mobile power/s and counterfactual evidence that operate through and on the Net. Not just for what sorts of countermanding, radical alternatives (and subversions) that may be operating there but also in order to demystify the self-fulfilling prophecies contained in all forms of technological and cultural determinisms. There is little time to lose however; hyper-liberal and neoconservative political and corporate power brokers have turned their significant resources to moulding Internet technologies after their own image, in strategic alliances with some pretty autocratic political regimes or through lucrative contracts with some

hell bent Western governments closer to company HQ. This appropriation of the Internet as a tool and facilitator of the latest civilizing mission and its *global market forces* has been swift to take on a phalanx of real and virtual 'freedom fighters', in cyberspace, outer space, and (in a mobile telephone age) in the streets. Postcolonialist and Marxist democratic projects speak directly to this latest set of 'civilizational' – viz. capitalist – (mis)appropriations.

This chapter's task was, in light of the often overlooked, under-rated contribution of Michel de Certeau's work to radical democratic strategies and equally unheralded existence of postcolonial cyberspatial practices, to put some conceptual flesh and empirical muscle-tone on both postcolonialist and Marxist debates about democracy vis-à-vis the Internet. As such it is a plea for the incorporation of postcolonial peoples' practices, in today's cyberspaces and with respect to (trans)local practices of everyday life on the ground. Participants in the *Pacific Islands Online* have been (re)articulating, practising democracy *in their own terms* and *for their own needs*. However partial or prescient their nascent postcolonial politics of representation may be for individual lives, communities, and political scenarios at the moment, cumulative content and online-to-offline rearticulations like these can redress lacunae in Marxism and postcolonialism. To wit, whether working within or despite the practicalities of the so-called Internet Age, a fuller-bodied and radically democratic theorization of ICTs can only really get going when accompanied by more empirical knowledge, more effectively interfaced and intercultural understandings of the multivariate (post)colonial subject-positions, translocal mobility, and (cyber)spatiality that are rearticulating one another: on the ground as well as in cyberspace.

Notes

Thank you to Debbie Lisle, Eugenia Siapera, and Niko Besnier for their helpful comments and criticisms. This chapter went to press just prior to the death of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV (1918–2006). His eldest son, King George Tupou V (Tupouto'a) succeeded him to the throne.

1. The exceptions to this rule in Marxist literature are taken as read, as are analytical delineations of terms: 'ICTs', the 'Internet', the 'World Wide Web', 'cyberspace', and so on.
2. Let two notable examples suffice as illustration; As Hardt and Negri argue (2000), taking up a gauntlet thrown down by Laclau and Mouffe fifteen years earlier (1985, pp. 8 passim, 42 passim, 163–4), ICTs are inseparable from the emergent 'decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule

that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers'; *Empire* (Hardt & Negri 2000, p. xii). These landmark books, differences in their analytic-ontological premises and the vicissitudes of their reception notwithstanding, are defining moments in Marxist auto-critiques in the face of hi-tech capitalist entrenchment and unabated (cyber) consumerism every which way.

3. Three editions, including the French original, are offered here for consultation.
4. The sections below draw on Franklin (2004) where more on method and background can be found. See Hereniko & Wilson (1999), Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman (2000), Morton (1999) and *Pacific Journalism Review* (2005), for more on race/ethnicity online, the postcolonial Pacific, and 'indigenous public spheres' and the Internet respectively.
5. The websites (accessed 8/05/06) are the Polynesian Café at http://Polycafe.com and the Kamehameha Roundtable at http://Polycafe.com/Kamehameha/kamehamehaF.htm. See also Samoan Sensation at http://samoa.co.uk; other forums for Tongan populations like Planet Tonga at http://planet-tonga.com; a government-sponsored portal, Tonga Now! at http://tonga-now.to; the Pacific Islands' Internet Society (PICISOC) at http://www.picisoc.org. The Pacific Forum and Polynesian Café portals were pioneers in grassroots cyberspaces for Pacific Island populations.
6. All citations from online sources are cited verbatim, typos included; sourced in the bibliography according to the author's (nick)name in the first message (initial post); NINJA in this case. For the ethical and practical rationale behind this approach see Franklin (2004, pp. 12–14, 202–4).
7. Tonga is, with Samoa and Fiji, one of the 'three remaining truly aristocratic societies of the South Pacific' (Hau'ofa, 1992, pp. 3, 5). The 1875 constitution, which codified the King's rule and male chiefly rights to land tenure, and installed a Bill of Rights, has remained largely unchanged since then (Latukefu, 1992). Executive power resides with the King and his appointed Cabinet from the nobility (*Hou'eiki*), who outnumber elected People's Representatives ('commoners') in the Legislative Assembly by twenty-one to nine. Tonga's ICT (significant by Pacific Island standards), telecom, and media sectors are owned and/or controlled by the late King's three children, personal business interests that mesh uneasily for onlookers with public office or '*noblesse oblige*'. Government reforms mooted in the lead-up to the 2005 General Election did, in fact, see four *elected* representatives appointed – by the King – to the Cabinet; two each from the People and nobility (Fonua, 2006).
8. The THRDM – formerly the *Pro-Democracy Movement* and recently reconstructed as the *People's National Committee for Political Reform* (PNCPR) – advocates constitutional reform to increase *elected* and non-noble representation in government. Steady electoral success has been booked since its inception in 1992, as have corresponding official counter-measures: imprisonment, public scolding in mainstream media, legislation tabled to curb 'foreign' (viz. independent, off-shore Tongan') ownership of publications critical of the government; the *Taimi 'O Tonga* newspaper is a case in point – http://www.taimiotonga.com [1/03/06]. See also: Pacific Media Watch (2003); Franklin (2004, pp. 109–12). Circa 2006, overlapping – and competing – Reform/Pro-Democracy platforms are currently courting ex-pat voters and financial support from Australia and New Zealand (*Oxfam*, 2005; *Matangi*

Tonga, 2006). Gauging the offline-to-online links in line with recent events on the ground indicates new paths for inquiry.

9. This is a reference to the *fahu* system in which the (first-born) daughter/sister/sister-in-law enjoys a higher ranking to her male siblings (in-law) within Tongan extended families (*kainga*). That said, this type of *kinship* (rather then individual) relationship does not preclude Tongan husbands from having a higher rank than their wives across the board (Niko Besnier, personal email: 16 June 2006).
10. Things came to a head early in 2006 when Prime Minister Lavaka (the King's younger son) unexpectedly resigned. He was replaced by an elected MP, Pro-Democracy campaigner and 'commoner' Dr Fileti (Fred) Sevele, a 'first' in Tongan politics. My thanks here go to Niko Besnier and Heather Young Leslie for their tip-offs and delineations. See the websites Note Six for ongoing discussions about who may, or may not be actually calling the shots on the ground.
11. Postcolonial theories dovetail with feminist and gender theories in this de-centring of white, male subject-positions and voice-overs, those of privileged white/Western-based females as well (see Franklin, 2001, pp. 387–422; 2004, pp. 198–9).
12. Here, like others, I have to take issue with Hardt and Negri's caricatured conflation of postmodern with postcolonial theories as functions of 'postmodern capitalism'. Their point about how far critique is transformative in itself is, however, well taken – an insight also germane to said 'postie' approaches.
13. My thanks to Debbie Lisle for reminding me of the dichotomizing potential in Certeau's 'overly schematic' positing of (bottom-up) *tactics* versus (top-down) *strategies* (Certeau, 2002, p. 65; see Franklin, 2002). Internet-age binaries, like online-offline, zero/one, or real/virtual, compound this tendency, which can only be flagged at this point.

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11

Hegemony or Multitude? Two Versions of Radical Democracy for the Net

Nick Dyer-Witheford

Introduction

If we are to discuss radical democracy and the Internet a good place to start is by considering what radical democracy is, or might be. This chapter compares two versions of the concept. The first is associated with the post-Marxist perspectives of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the second with the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who are today the most well-known theorists remaking a tradition of autonomist Marxism. These two accounts are by no means the only interpretations of radical democracy current today.[1] But they are two of the most influential. Both respond to the crisis of left politics caused by the collapse of state socialism and the rise of neoliberalism. Both start in Marxism, but depart in heretical directions. Both are influenced by postmodern or post-structuralist thought. And both have been produced over the very period when the Internet, and the digital in general, has become a field of radical activism.

The post-Marxist radical democracy of Laclau and Mouffe and the hyper-Marxist radical democracy of Hardt and Negri are, however, different. They flow from separate and hostile historical sources, diverge in their theoretical premises, and are aligned with distinct political movements, practices, and strategies. Indeed these two traditions of radical democracy are often explicitly critical of one another. The sympathies of this author lie, as my previous writings make clear, more with the autonomist tradition than the post-Marxist one (Dyer-Witheford, 1999). Here, however, I suggest that neither of these versions of radical democratic theory is, in their current iterations, adequate to recreate a politics of networked commonality for the twenty-first century. While both bring important insights to this task, they also reveal substantial

deficits. And these strengths and weaknesses are clearly on display in their respective treatments, or non-treatments, of the Internet.

Put baldly, my argument revolves around two categories, 'communication' and 'capitalism'. The post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe presents an excellent analysis of the importance of communication to radical democratic movements, but represses recognition of the obstacle global capitalism poses to such projects. The hyper-Marxism of Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, fully recognizes the barrier that capital presents to any radical democratic project, but fails in its understanding of the importance of communicative practices to social movements.

Of course, things are not as simple as this tidy equation suggests. They are both worse, and better. They are worse because the weaknesses of each version of radical democracy detract from its apparent strengths. The failure of Laclau and Mouffe to properly confront the problem of capital rebounds to undermine their otherwise sophisticated theory of communicative practices. Hardt and Negri's neglect of the communicative dimensions of contemporary radicalism impairs their theoretical challenge to capital's empire. This set of reciprocal impairments might lead to a gloomy conclusion. The brighter side of the analysis, however, is that there are possibilities that these two late twentieth-century optics may actually instruct each other, and in their mutual interference contribute to the production of fresh versions of radical democratic theory and practice for a new millennium.

Post-Marxist hegemony

Radical democracy emerged as a term central to debates about the future of the left with the publication of Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). In what was seen by former comrades as an act of appalling apostasy, Laclau, an esteemed Marxist theoretician, announced a turn to post-Marxism. The problems of classical Marxism – the authoritarianism of Soviet-style socialism, the failure of revolutionary movements in the West – had, Laclau and Mouffe said, become catastrophic. These problems they traced to an economic essentialism. Class struggle was assumed to be the central axis of social conflict, class identity was taken as definitive of political position and groups who lead the class struggle – the vanguard party – arrogated totalitarian powers. But class logic had manifestly failed to play out as expected. Rather than the sharpening polarization between bourgeoisie and proletarians predicated by Marx, advanced capitalist societies showed increasingly complex and variegated social configuration, in which many of the most important

struggles were those of new social movements of focused on issues such as gender, the environment, and ethnicity.

To explain this scene, Laclau and Mouffe, influenced by the post-structuralist thought of Derrida and Lacan, turned away from the Marxian focus on the production to a post-structuralist emphasis on discourse. It is impossible here to do full justice to the sophistication, and difficulty, of the theory Laclau and Mouffe developed (see Witheford & Gruneau, 1993). But, in brief: far from being a mere reflex of economic position, social identities – gender, ethnicity, and indeed even class itself – are symbolic constructions generated by contested play of meaning. A person's subject-position depends, like the meaning of a word, on how it is inserted in chains of signification. What it means to be a 'woman', a 'worker', a 'white', a 'citizen', a 'consumer', or a 'commoner', is constantly being redefined, and this definition in turn depends on how every other identity (as, for example 'man' and 'women' define each other in a well-known binarism).

In this situation, the creation of political movements depends not on any automatic class logic, but on the construction of antagonisms, in which certain identities oppose each other, and equivalences, where identities are aligned and support each other. So, for example, in certain socialist traditions 'workers' are by association gendered (male) and ethnicized (white) or nationalized ('our' workers against foreign 'cheap labor'). Or to be a 'green' may be an identity that implies opposition to 'workers' who are committed to 'industrialization'; but it might also be seen a commitment to environmental transformation that entails an opposition to 'corporations', and hence opens to forms of red–green alliance. Or to be 'gay' may be to claim the status of 'citizen' – with rights to marriage and military service – or, alternatively, to subvert these civic identities in alliance with other subjects marginalized by the state (Butler, Laclau, Žižek, 2000).

The break with Marxism was clear. Instead of an economically determined set of class relations, the social is seen as an open, fluid, 'unsutured' field, constituted by a plurality of power relations and struggles – over class, gender, race the environment – none of which can be said to have any priority over, or intrinsic connection with, another, although they may be contingently linked together.

Nonetheless, even as they moved to post-Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe claimed to take inspiration from a Marxist theoretician. Antonio Gramsci (1973) had, in their interpretation, veered away from an economist perspective toward complex process of political and cultural identity formation. His concept of hegemony – a political project that can

assume leadership of society based on carefully forged set of alliances among various groups – provided, Laclau and Mouffe suggested, the key to a future left strategy.

The hegemony they sought is that of 'radical democracy'. Democracy is, they suggested, one of those contested signifiers whose meaning has been redefined and realigned with different identities. Initially the prerogative of white, male property owners against monarchic power, its meaning become progressively enlarged through struggle to include middle- and working-class voters, women, ethnic minorities, and encompassed a successively larger orbit of rights not just the vote, but freedom of speech and assembly, education or even welfare state measures. Rather than rejecting this liberal democratic legacy, as many Marxisms do, the left should redefine itself as deepening and expanding it – so that, for example, democracy would include equal civil rights for sexual minorities or a citizen voice over environmental conditions. In this way, Laclau and Mouffe said, socialism could redeem itself from the catastrophe of Stalinism and remake itself to answer the emergent neoliberal challenge of Thatcher and Reagan.

This manifesto was met with denunciation from the Marxist hard-left (Wood, 1986; Geras, 1987, 1988). But its timing was unanswerable. Within four years of the appearance of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* the Berlin Wall had fallen, the USSR collapsed, and the vanguard party's repressive proclivities re-demonstrated at Tiennanman Square. Not only was Eastern Europe lit up with democratic hopes, but so was South Africa, with the dismantling of the apartheid regime. If ever time was ripe for post-Marxism, this was it. With the historical wind in their sails, Laclau (1990, 1996) and Mouffe (2000, 2005) separately produced further expansions on their concept of radical democracy, which was in turn discussed, and often embraced in several edited collections (Laclau, 1994; Mouffe, 1992), strongly influenced by theorists such as Stuart Hall (1989), and continues to be debated (Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000).

Not seeing e-capital

Laclau and Mouffe's theory, with its emphasis on language, signification, and communication seems eminently suited to address the radical potential of the Net. Indeed, their account of how social movements form and reform through shifting linkages within a perpetually changing constellation of decentered, discursively constructed social relationships, where who you are depends on who you link to, reads in many ways like a parable of the hyper-textual World Wide Web. *Hegemony and*

Socialist Strategy actually appeared slightly before the take off of the Net as a popular media. But elaborations on its thesis, both by the authors and sympathetic commentators, coincided with the period when email and the Web became common to academics and activists alike. It is, therefore, rather surprising how little post-Marxist radical democrats have had to say about Net activism: neither the works of Laclau and Mouffe nor the collections they edited discuss the topic. This present volume will undoubtedly rectify the omission. But such a correction must, I suggest, take account of deficits in the post-Marxist theory which to date, largely prevented this version of radical democracy coming to terms with the digital.

Post-Marxism's basic difficulty in dealing with the Internet is its desire to duck the problem of capitalism. As Žižek (2000) has noted, Laclau and Mouffe's work implicitly accepts that the struggle for hegemony is fought within, not against, the horizons of the world market. The failure of the revolutionary proletariat means, paradoxically, that the private ownership of the means of production ceases to be a problem. This evasion, which is not total, but strongly tendential, manifests more as omission than commission, in what is left unsaid, as a quick brushing over of issues of markets and commodification, with an implication that such matters are well known – which then becomes an excuse for not engaging them at all. An alternative route – one represented by the autonomist Marxists we will discuss shortly – would be to generate an analysis of the increasingly complex and fractal forms of class conflict generated by advanced capitalism. But Laclau and Mouffe, bravely throwing out the proletarian baby (which was showing definite signs of arrested development) also threw out of the all-important bathwater of general commodification and corporate power, in which we continue to be awash.

How does this bear on the capacity of post-Marxism to analyze the Internet? It is impossible to grasp the emergence and evolution of digital networks outside the context of global capital. It is well known that the Net emerged as a by-product of the Cold War confrontation between capital and state socialism (Edwards, 1997). From there it passed into the academic infrastructures whose rapid expansion through the 1960s and 1970s was tied to the techno-scientific agenda of US capital's corporate and military wings (Schiller, 1999). The new means of communication gradually diffused into widening corporate use, which then began to promote access to networks among the affluent consumers. A commercialization marked by the entry of Microsoft into the field and its 'browser' wars with rivals such as Netscape accelerated toward the speculative dot.com boom of the 1990s, followed by the massive Internet

stock market meltdown, one of the largest liquidations of financial value in world history (Cassidy, 2002). This catastrophe is now being followed, in the typical rhythm of capital's cyclical logic, by a period of recuperation and consolidation, focused around search engines. Rudimentary as this thumbnail sketch is, it should suggest how access to the Net, the conditions of its organization, the growth of networked labor, and a host of issues from surveillance to censorship and filtering, only become comprehensible within the framework of the political economy of advanced capital.

This opens up a more general weakness of post-Marxism. As we have seen, Laclau and Mouffe take 'discourse' as their central theoretical category. But though they build on a general linguistic model, they offer little analysis of how access to discourse is regulated and distributed. Rather, it figures as a sort of transcendentally present medium within and through which social movements make their moves. Ian Angus (2000), though generally sympathetic to Laclau and Mouffe, has noted this problem and suggested their perspective needs a greater attention to the materiality of specific media. The issue of who may in fact 'discourse', of who speaks and who is silenced, who has access to what means of communication, under what conditions of price, censorship, or surveillance, is a very concrete one. Discourse is not just the terrain of the battle for hegemony, but also, and simultaneously the stake in the struggle. Who commands which means of communication is a question critical in determining what articulations may or may not be made. And in advanced capitalism, the conditions of discourse, both its proliferation and its blockages, are deeply set by corporate power.

This is not to say that the Net can be reduced to a reflex of accumulation. On the contrary, digital activism constantly escapes this reduction in proliferating revolts (Dyer-Witheford, 2002). But these are escapes *from* something – from the actually-existing hegemonic pressures of commerce and its state-supports. Furthermore, to the degree that activists re-appropriated the Net, its importance lies in the alternative digital networks offer to the more easily controllable older media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, where well-known processes of corporate filtering are strong. If the Net appears as a new form of commons or public sphere, this is significant against the background – which should never be allowed to become invisible – of normal capitalist hegemony. The history of the Net cannot be told just as the story of e-capital. But it is made up of multiple lines of fight or flight from capitalist subsumption – as a move and counter-move between e-capital and anti-capital or non-capital. This, however, is precisely the analysis on which post-Marxism

forecloses. And it is this foreclosure that accounts for the embarrassed silence with which most post-Marxists greeted the emergence in the 1990s of anti-corporate globalization movements, movements that were to push cyber activism to the forefront of radical practices, and find new theoretical expressions.

Multitude against Empire

The anti-globalization, counter-globalization, new internationalist, or global justice movement – or just the movement of movements – simmering around the planet for a decade burst into North American news at Seattle in 2000. Among the many theoretical perspectives it generated, the most controversial appeared that same year, in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000). As we have seen these authors take up many of the same problems as Laclau and Mouffe, but there are sharp differences between their political projects – differences with a history.

Negri was a leading theorist of autonomist Marxism (Cleaver, 1979; Dyer-Witheford, 1999), which in Italy of the late 1970s was among a network of social movements pitted against a governmental coalition lead by the Christian Democrats. Among this state coalition was the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which, wearing the mantle of Gramsci, had entered into a 'historic compromise' with conservative forces. In a crisis triggered by Red Brigade terrorism, thousands of *autonomia* activists were arrested, imprisoned, or forced to flee their country. Thus for Negri the Gramscian logic of hegemony, so central to Laclau and Mouffe, with its pliability toward deals with liberal democracy, far from signifying a progressive logic, meant jail, exile, and the crushing of revolutionary hopes.

Whereas Laclau and Mouffe responded to the left's late-century crisis with post-Marxism, Negri replied with a hyper-Marxism, which, rather than rejecting the analysis of class conflict, audaciously reinterpreted it. Autonomists emphasized, not the power of capital, but the independence, or autonomy, of labor. Capital attempts to control human creativity as labor power from which to extract profit. But this control is never fully achieved. Subjects resist reduction to the status of object, and humans are to capital always a problematic 'other' that circumvents or challenges its command. Labor, Negri says, is a 'dynamic subject, an antagonistic force tending toward its own independent identity'(1988, p. 209).

Capitalist power and worker counter-power provoke each other to ever widening conflict in a *cycle of struggles*. Class conflict mutates. Certain sectors (say, the industrial proletariat), strategies (say, the vanguard party),

or cultural forms (say, singing the Internationale) fade. But this does not extinguish the underlying antagonism which, on the contrary, resurfaces across ever wider domains. Autonomists trace three historical phases: that of the professional (or artisanal) worker, in earlier capitalism, when the hot spot is control of craft work; the period of the mass worker, with conflict in the industrial factory; and the epoch of the socialized worker, arriving in the 1968 tumults, when antagonism moves out of the factory to involve society as a whole.

In this last phase, conflict between capital and its subjects not only involves an increasing variety of workplaces but also entirely new arenas. Control of welfare, health care, education, and media become as important to capital as the labor process, and as contested. Rather than seeing new social movements as a radical break with class war, autonomists say they expand struggle over the allocation of social surplus. Feminism, for example, challenges the assumption reproductive labor will be done for free (Dalla Costa & James, 1972); student movements assert the collective value of education against privatization and cut-back; anti-racist struggles are hyphenated with those against the exploitation of 'Third World' and migrant labor. While Laclau sees the decline of the industrial proletariat as a death-knell to class conflict, Negri understands it as an explosion in which an inescapable antagonism cascades throughout the entire scope of society.

This analysis, incubated over some thirty years in relative obscurity, leaped into public attention with its new inflection in *Empire*. Just as Laclau and Mouffe's theories tapped into the reverberations of a falling Berlin Wall, so Hardt and Negri caught on their page the reek of tear gas rising from Seattle, Prague, Quebec City, and Genoa. Their topic is 'globalization'. Empire is a universalizing yet decentered world-market regime, organized by no single nation or force – not even the US – but rather through a hybrid, multilayered ensemble of political, corporate, and non-governmental organizations, constituting itself in incessant improvised crisis control, operating to extract profit from both the spatial and social entirety of life through a play of financial, cultural, and judicial networks ultimately backed by the stupendous military force deployed in recurrent police actions.

If this was all there was to *Empire*, however, it would be just another denunciation of corporate world order. What made it exceptional was its assertion of an emergent counter-power: 'the multitude'. The term derives from Spinoza and early seventeenth-century radical democratic traditions. But this is now fused not only with a Marxist analysis, but with post-structural perspectives, including Foucault's analysis of the resistance internal to power and Deleuze and Guattari's themes of

rhizomatic networks. The multitude is a postmodern update of the proletariat, now conceived not as labor power but as a far more expansive 'biopower' whose life-energies capital mobilizes not just at work, but in consumption, education, as media-audiences and medical-subjects. It is the creative, multiplicitous subject whose constitutive power Empire simultaneously requires, requisitions and represses.

The multitude is a force that in Hardt and Negri's 'Roman' metaphor is variously identified with slaves, barbarians, or Christians. And the authors' inventory of its rebellions go well beyond Eurocentric boundaries, including Los Angeles 1992, Tiennaman Square 1989, Chiapas 1994, France 1995, the Palestinian Infitada, and the struggles of refugees and 'nomadic' immigrant labor to constitute a vision of contestation on a truly world-scale. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of Empire is that it is not an anti-globalization tract, but a manifesto for a counter-globalizing left. Rather than retreating to state protectionism, or anarcho-localism, it urges seizing the affirmative possibilities of an interconnected planet.

'Radical democracy' is not a trademark phrase of Hardt and Negri's, but it recurs in their writings. *Empire*'s sequel, *Multitud*e, is subtitled *War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004). Calling for a 'left resurrected and reformed . . . on the basis of new practices, new forms of organization, and new concepts' they say 'democracy can no longer be evaluated in the liberal manner as limits of equality or in the socialist way as a limit of freedom but rather must be the radicalization without reserve of both freedom and equality' (p. 220). What this means more concretely is suggested in their earlier (2000, pp. 393–415) outlines of three main projects for 'counter-Empire': a 'global citizenship' allowing labor planetary mobility; a 'right to a social wage' freeing people from immiseration; and a 'right to reappropriation', democratizing access over technologies, especially those dealing with knowledge, information, and communication. Hardt and Negri's radical democracy, unlike Laclau and Mouffe's, is not compatible with the world market. Their strategy of 'exodus' (2000, p. 212) eschews insurrectionary Leninism in favor of the continuous construction of institutions and practices outside the commodity form. But this is clearly a 'democracy of the multitude' (2004, p. 328) that is not post-Marxist, but beyond capital.

Immaterial labor, but *incommunicado*

Widely discussed in academic and activist forums, reviewed in the mainstream press, and inspiring two critical anthologies (Balakrishnan, 2003; Passavant & Dean, 2004), *Empire* was nothing if not controversial.

I will focus only on those debates that relate directly to the digital, in particular those around immaterial labor and articulation.

Empire's analysis of globalization and counter-globalization allocates a central importance to 'immaterial labor'. This category, which Hardt and Negri developed with others involved in the journal *Futur Antérieur,* designates the distinctive quality of work in 'the epoch in which information and communication play an essential role in each stage of the process of production' (Lazzarato & Negri, 1991, p. 86). It includes high-tech professionals, production workers using computers, and emotional labor, involving the generation of affect (such as pleasure or excitement from media). Such labor is, Hardt and Negri argue, the critical mode of biopower capital must expropriate and manage today. Communication, they emphasize, is crucial to Empire. The digital networks of immaterial labor are the contemporary equivalent of roads traversing the Roman world, the connective tissue of military and commercial power. Yet, they argue, 'immaterial labor' also contains immense liberatory possibility. Intimate, everyday familiarity with the machines of knowledge and information makes possible the formation of a the socialized, collective intelligence, the 'general intellect' that Marx in his *Grundrisse* notebooks saw as marking the terminal limit of capitalism.

The 'immaterial labor thesis' seemed to grasp the counter-globalization movement's startling re-appropriation of communication. By 2000, the multitude was busting out with tactical media and cyber-activism, from the Zapatistas in Cyberspace to the Independent Media Centers to electronic civil disobedience. As many observed, Internet use profoundly affected the organizational form of the movement of movements, encouraged a convergence of its demands, and catalyzed an alarmed discussion of countermeasures in neoliberal think tanks. Because Empire addressed corporate power, struggles against it, and the strategic importance of immaterial labor, it accounted for this digital insurgency far better than Laclau and Mouffe's abstract discourse analysis. And indeed, Hardt and Negri's work was circulated, discussed, and developed among Net-activists.

And yet, *Empire* also displays a bewildering inconsistency in its treatment of communication. When Hardt and Negri consider the interrelation of multiple global struggles, they suddenly assert that insurgencies from Chiapas to Paris to Seoul 'cannot communicate' with another. Despite all the availability of networks and media, 'struggles have become all but incommunicable'. Not only do the various outbreaks lack 'a common language' but this lack is a sign of strength. So omnipresent

and planet wide are the operations of imperial power that each revolt, while unable to communicate 'horizontally' with others can, in its own isolated singularity 'leap vertically and touch immediately on the global level'. Thus, even though the movements of the multitude are *incommunicado* one from another, they nevertheless between themselves constitute a 'new kind of proletarian solidarity' (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 54).

Many commentators, including this author (Dyer-Witheford, 2001) have taken issue with this bizarre assertion, which contradicts decades of energetic autonomous media practice. What else are all those Indymedia centers, guerrilla news sites, email lists doing? How can we understand, for example the galvanizing effects that the bulletins of Sub-Commandante Marcos had on mobilizations against neoliberalism around the planet, or the success of largely Internet-waged campaigns such as that against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment other than as a horizontal communication of struggles?

Others have seen in this '*incommunicado*' thesis not just a neglect of concrete examples of inter and intra-movement communication, but also a major failure of theoretical conception. And one of the most acerbic of these is Laclau (2004), who has scathingly criticized *Empire*'s faith in the spontaneous aggregation of heterogeneous anti-capitalist revolts, without any political coordination, other than a common anti-capitalism. This 'immanent' logic, he says, clashes with the 'most elementary evidence of the political scene, which shows us a proliferation of social actors fighting each other for a variety of religious, ethnic or religious reasons'. What is 'totally lacking in *Empire*', says Laclau, 'is a theory of articulation, without which politics are unthinkable' concluding '[m]ultitudes are never spontaneously multitudinarious; though only become so through political action' (2004, pp. 26–30).

One does not have to buy the whole post-Marxist package to take his point. A contemporary counter-hegemonic project today, must by definition (and contra Laclau and Mouffe), confront global capital; but it also (contra Hardt and Negri) needs a theory of alliance, association, and affinity. Repeating a weakness endemic to many Marxisms *Empire* emphasizes homogenizing effects of global capital, and the expense of understanding the divisions among its laborers. Hardt and Negri's emphasis on immaterial labor suggests a common class composition running throughout the multitude. Because this unity is posited as *already* existing, communication between insurgencies is devalued.

In reality, of course, there are deep differences and complex contradictions both between and within anti-corporate movements. The demands

of workers in the Global South may entail sacrifices by their Northern counterparts; economic equity can collide with green agendas; anti-globalization mobilizations are not immune from protectionist chauvinism; and so on. Such barriers to a 'multitudinous' insurgency can be overcome. But the project is one of 'articulation' between diverse movements whose identity of interests is not immediately given. Because of its over-expanded category of immaterial labor, and its consequently simplified notion of planetary class composition, *Empire* masks these difficulties. There are many different strands to radical digital activism – agitprop, coordination, and education. But most are engaged, in different registers, in this linking, connecting and communicating between sectors of the multitude. It is the failure to recognize this activity that hobbles Hardt and Negri's analysis.

This is all the more frustrating because within the autonomist tradition there *is* a concept that applies directly to this activity – that of the 'circulation of struggles' (Bell & Cleaver, 1982). This is the counterpoint to the more familiar idea of the circulation of capital: while the former looks at the linkages, connections, and flow of commodities, the latter looks at the linkages, connections, and flow of struggles against commodification. Circulation of struggles approximates an autonomist Marxist equivalent to the theory of articulation, applied to the contest with capital post-Marxism evades. A number of autonomist theorists have analyzed counter-globalization Internet use in these terms – most notably Cleaver (1994) in his account of the critical role of Zapatistas in creating an 'electronic fabric of struggle', but also Dorothy Kidd (2004) and Dyer-Witheford (1999) in regard to other examples. In its full-frontal address of capitalist globalization and 'immaterial labor', Hardt and Negri's analysis opens a strong analysis of digital activism. But it has to be said that their analysis has a gaping weakness, in the very area where it might be expected to be strongest, that of the communicative aspect of truly radical democratic project.

Conclusion

The two versions of radical democracy that we have examined are each products of a specific era, marked by a constellation of concerns and orientations that can be pinned to a specific decade – Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism a creation of the late 1980s fall of state socialism, Hardt and Negri's of the 1990s' counter-globalization movement. The 2000s present a very different conjuncture. If its most salient features are the post-9/11 wars, the destructive effects of these events lie not

only in their immediate destructiveness but in their subtraction of global resources and attention from interwoven problems, of global poverty, HIV/AIDS catastrophe, climate change, ecological and biodiversity implosions, energy crises, and new superpower rivalries. Response to this ominous trajectory will require a radical politics very different from that of either Berlin in 1989, or Seattle in 2000.

As a contribution to a new wave of radical democracy on the Internet, it would not be very constructive merely to stage a stand-off between the post-Marxism of Laclau and Mouffe and the hyper-Marxism of Hardt and Negri. To just assert an unresolved fight between theories of 'hegemony' and 'multitude' is sterile. More productive is to consider what each of these schools might learn from the other, and the ways the theoretical strengths of both might be synthesized into radical perspectives for the twenty-first century. Therefore I conclude by suggesting three possible points in such a new synthesis, involving three circulations – the circulation of capital, the circulation of struggles, and the circulation of commons.

The problematic of capital – that is, of a social system predicated on the control of economic resources by class of private owners – needs to be at the heart of any project of radical democracy, on the Internet or elsewhere. Whatever its intent, one effect of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism, with its turn away from class to new social movements, was to suspend or put in abeyance consideration of democratizing, or socializing, the means of production. These issues were returned to the table by the anti-corporate and often anti-capitalist, energy of the global justice movement, whose challenge to the world market is expressed in Hardt and Negri's theory of multitude. On this point, post-Marxism stands corrected by hyper-Marxism. While there will be plenty of debate about the scale and speed of transformations to the world market, this resumption of economic issue for will define the radicalism of any democratic project, for none of the planetary issues mentioned above can be addressed without challenging the preeminence of commodity exchange.[2] In terms of digital networks, radical democratic analysis needs to situate the Internet as a media central to the circulation of capital, and clearly recognize how this shapes crucial issues such as the market-limitation of access (aka 'digital divides'), increasingly draconian intellectual property regimes, the collaboration of e-capital with authoritarian states and the military-industrial complex, and the stifling of radical potentials of digitization to which we return briefly below.

Radical democratic movements confronting global capital also need, however, a more sophisticated concept of political alliance than is

provided by the spontaneism of Hardt and Negri's theory of the multitude. The creation of the multitude depends on linkages of numerous specific struggles, different locales and by different subjects. And if such linkages are to be liberatory, it is not enough to rely on shared being against capital. This is underlined post-9/11, by the advent of fundamentalist Islam as a militant opponent of capitalist modernity – and one which, moreover, shows a paradoxical affinity to the digital: Al-Qaeda is today arguably the most striking exemplar of subversive Net politics (Retort, 2005). Elsewhere I have proposed thinking of a triangular configuration in which the global justice, or what I term 'species-being', movements are opposed to both the world market and fundamentalist revivalisms of various types (Dyer-Witheford, 2004). But regardless of terminology, such radical democratic movements need to carefully theorize how they constitute themselves in alliance with and opposition to other political projects and identities. This point, critical to all those weaving an 'electronic fabric of struggle' of the Net, begs a more refined and complex concept of the circulation of struggles than Hardt and Negri offer; it requires, indeed, something much closer to Laclau and Mouffe's theory of articulation.

Third, I suggest a future radical democratic project needs to attend more closely to what it struggling for than either of the two versions examined here. It is easy to say: 'This is what democracy looks like' and that 'Another world is possible'. But neither Laclau and Mouffe nor Hardt and Negri offer more than the thin sketch of what radical democracy looks like, or what other world they prefer. There is a strong case for a revival of grounded utopian vision, envisaging future societal possibilities plausibly emergent from contemporary conditions. Here a digital imaginary prefiguring the place of networked technologies in a radical democracy is crucial. Two paths that deserve especial attention are the 'free' and the 'planned'. By the 'free' I mean the cornucopian elements of digital production and distribution, made possible by non-rivalrous consumption of informational resources, and typified in the open source, peer-to-peer, and grid computing initiatives, capacities which will more and more influence material production with the advent of micro-fabricating and nanotechnologies. By the 'planned' I mean the capacities of computing networks for forecasting, simulating, calculating, and inventorying resource allocation, and for doing so in the context of very complex monitoring of issues of global ecology. These organizing capacities put on a practical horizon prospects of participatory, democratic economic planning in ways inconceivable two decades ago. The 'free' and the 'planned' are two routes toward the creation of

a whole new terrain of public goods – what I term the circulation of the common – routes that are perhaps to some degree in tension with each other, but which, precisely because of this tension, may offer prospects on actualizing possibilities for non-totalitarian radical democratic alternatives to the world market.

In sum, my suggestion is that post-Marxist and hyper-Marxist versions of radical democracy both need to go beyond their current limits, and may, in fact assist each other in doing so. Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony theory should be jolted out its capitulations to the world market; Hardt and Negri's celebrations of the multitude need a cooler analysis of how movements articulate together; and both would be strengthened by a fuller envisaging of the institutional forms and processes for which they fight, including the place of digital networks. On and off the Net, such an articulation, or circulation, of differing theoretical struggles will create stronger movements toward radical democracy.

Notes

1. For example, this chapter does not address the work of Roberto Unger (2001).
2. The return to these economic issues is evident in recent comments by Laclau and Mouffe where they show some anxiety to distance their work from the convergence with Blair-style 'third way-ism' of which it has been accused.

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12
Internet Piracy as Radical Democracy?

Mark Poster

> Sharing data is the beginning of humanity. Skip Gates, TV ad for Linux

Introduction

In this chapter, I shall estimate the impulses to radical democracy emerging in the context of peer-to-peer file sharing. This type of exchange of text, music, and images raises the issue of who controls cultural objects, one that goes to the heart of contemporary societies since they increasingly depend on information in a planetary context.[1] File sharing through peer-to-peer software promises radically to democratize the production and distribution of culture, threatening the culture industry and opening widely the process of cultural creation.

Controlling information and its hazards

The case of the Soviet Union is instructive in this regard. This bureaucratic state abhorred the free flow of information and attempted to restrict technologies that promoted it, such as photocopy machines, computers, video cassette recorders (VCRs), etc. When the Soviet Union began to manufacture VCRs they excluded the capability of recording, limiting VCRs to playback machines, thereby imagining the government could control the reproduction and distribution of moving images. In their effort to control information, to keep information in the hands of the bureaucrats at designated levels of the hierarchy of the state apparatus, the Soviet political machine wrestled hopelessly with the increasing spread of machines throughout society that were capable of reproducing and disseminating texts, images, and sounds. As machine

after machine was introduced as a consumer item, the Soviets attempted to control culture as it was in 1917, at the beginning of socialist society. While the West especially after World War II increasingly integrated information machines at all levels of society and in all corners of everyday life – raising productivity with automation, empowering consumers against giant corporations like AT&T with inexpensive telephones, promoting youth cultures with cheap radios, assisting in the proliferation of women's subcultures, ethnic communities, and groups with marginalized sexual orientations with electronic devices that preserve images and sounds – the Soviets resisted, fending off communications from the West as well as the information machines that promote the creation and distribution of culture beyond the control of the government. Some observers go so far as to attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union exactly to its defensive and futile policy of information control (Castells, 1998).

The music industry (Recording Industry Association of America, RIAA, until 2003 represented by Hilary Rosen) and the film industry (with Jack Valenti as President of Motion Picture Association of America, MPAA, until 2004) reacted to the rapid spread of peer-to-peer file sharing of music and films much in the manner of the Soviet bureaucracy, and, as far as one can tell at this point, with much the same effect. The culture industries attempted to destroy the new information machines. They lobbied hard for the passage of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). And they would have us believe the DMCA is about the author's rights, the compensation of creative people for their innovations. In their suit of September 2003 the RIAA has acted as if downloading music files is *the same thing as* taking a music CD from a retail store without paying for it. This claim of equivalence is a political move that ignores the specificity and differences of each media – CDs and digital files (Hull, 2003). But if this were so, then the 12-year-old girl who was subpoenaed by the RIAA and settled the threatened suit out of court was capable of performing the same social functions as the music industry, that is, copying and distributing music. And in that case, clearly, the music industry is superfluous and redundant, far less efficient than the girl who accomplishes the tasks at almost no cost.

If the case of the Soviet Union's effort to control information technocultures is instructive, so is the case of the copyists assault on the print guilds in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The resort to political institutions like the legislature and the judiciary by industries threatened by technical progress is not at all new. As Jacques Attali reports in *Noise*, one hundred fifty years after the origin of the printing press in

Europe, copyists in France requested aid from the *Parlement de Paris* and received the right to destroy printing presses! (Attali, 1985). The copyists had good arguments. They produced beautiful illuminated manuscripts and codexes. Their works compared very favorably in comparison to the fledgling print industry. During the period of the production of incunabula in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, few of the later conventions of page composition were in practice. Margins, word and line spacing, paragraph demarcations, the use of periods and commas – all of these commonplaces of the printed page that make it so readable were not yet in use. Early products of the print industry are ugly and difficult to scan. True enough the copyists made many errors and their work was unreliable because of this. But the early print industry, contrary to modern expectations about the consistency of the printing press in comparison with the scriptoria, also habitually made errors (Newman, 1985). Authors had no assurance that their manuscripts would be faithfully reproduced by the stationers' guilds. Hierarchies of status within the print guilds did not give pride of place to authors who had not yet been elevated to the place of genius they would later enjoy. Instead masters and journeyman ruled the place of production. If journeyman compositors wished they simply altered the text to suit their sense of quality (Johns, 1998). The modern conception of the inviolability of the author's work as well as the concomitant cultural fetish for a uniform text were not yet inscribed in the practice of book-making. When the French copyists received the go-ahead to destroy printing presses they easily identified themselves as the aggrieved parties with rectitude (and no doubt God) on their side just as the contemporary music industry ascribes to itself the defense of the artists and the rights of private property.

But there is an important distinction in the two cases: the feudal copyists' confrontation with the printing press was based on the preservation and authority of tradition; capitalism's confrontation with peer-to-peer networks is justified by its commitment to technical progress. If the music industry wins its case against Internet technology, capitalism loses its legitimacy as the bearer of progress. The copyists did not have to defend themselves against the charge of holding back progress since no such ideological prescription prevailed. The music industry, on the contrary, must somehow show that progress is promoted by destroying an innovative and very promising information technology. They face an uphill battle, to put it mildly. In their defense, the music industry points to the fact that more music is available to consumers today than ever before. Their conclusion is that the current system works just fine and

that peer-to-peer networks will diminish the amount of music in circulation. The argument from complacency echoes the copyists' plaint too closely. If the status quo ante prevailed in the fifteenth century and the printing presses were somehow destroyed, one cannot imagine the loss. The printers' argument that their machines were more efficient, would produce more books at a cheaper cost, and would be of benefit to more individuals could not be proven in 1470. The same is true today: peer-to-peer file sharers cannot prove that a society without the RIAA will be better served than the current arrangement. These are counterfactual arguments that do not hold much water. Yet it is plain that a printing press works better than the human hand and that peer-to-peer networks are superior means of reproduction and distribution than Time Warner and EMI corporate facilities.[2] And to take the argument beyond economic calculation to political effects, one might also say that printing democratized books by enabling individuals of modest means to purchase them, that it made universal education possible for the same reason and that, finally, it was a condition of possibility for the democratic citizen since reading is a prerequisite for independent political judgment. Similarly, one can argue that peer-to-peer networks will loosen the stranglehold of the music industry on the circulation of music allowing far more musicians to be heard than presently is the case, that it will foster a greater proliferation of music as a result. In addition, peer-to-peer networks, as we shall see, promote the transformation and recirculation of music by the consumer, effectively laying the groundwork for the elevation of consumption into creativity, ending the bifurcation of production and consumption.

The politics of control, or politics as control

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) provides several instructive definitions of control. As a noun, the primary definition of control is 'The fact of controlling, or of checking and directing action; the function or power of directing and regulating; domination, command, sway.' As a verb, the definition is 'To check or verify, and hence to regulate.' The *OED* has also updates to definition of the noun control as follows: '**control freak** orig. *U.S.*, a person who demonstrates a need to exercise tight control over his or her surroundings, behavior, or appearance, esp. by assuming command of any situation or exerting authority over others.' The *OED* does not, of course, explore the question of the subject of control (What kind of agent has or seeks control?), nor that of the culture of control (To what extent is control by agents important to

a culture? and, more significantly, What is the nature of the subjects and objects in the culture that do the controlling or are regulated by such agents?). These questions animate my analysis of the music industry's relation to the innovation of digital technology. The numerous studies that raise the question of control in relation to digital media tend to assume that individual or collective agents are in positions of control or lack of control. They define the question as one of who ought to control the technology, never asking the more basic question: 'Is control by agents the best way critically to understand the general relation of digital technoculture to control? Do digital media support, enhance or undermine practices of control?'[3]

In the case of the DMCA, the music industry attempts to maintain control over their product in the face of the new technology of digital reproduction. I argue that the main issue in the enactment of the DMCA is the control of cultural objects. Digitization has radically altered the conditions of culture. In response, the RIAA has exerted enormous influence on politicians to pass laws, including the DMCA, to extend copyright to cover digital products. In this way the RIAA hopes to maintain control over cultural objects. It is often argued that the introduction of new technologies is accompanied by disruptions to the existing order of control, eliciting great expectations that democracy, peace and freedom will thereby be enhanced (Marvin, 1988). Most historians of technology, however, contend that as the new technology is disseminated throughout society and is assimilated into it, controlling agents that pre-existed the innovation soon regain their dominance (McCourt & Burkart, 2003, p. 342). This view, I argue, is blind to the manner in which information technologies alter both culture and society. Even if dominant institutions are not directly overthrown by new technologies, fundamental aspects of culture are indeed transformed by them. This argument cannot be developed here although it has been posited by many leading media theorists and historians (Adorno, 1972; Baudrillard, 1994; Heidegger, 1977; Kittler, 1986; Manovich, 2001; McLuhan, 1964; Poster, 2001). What I do want to avoid, however, is the premature conclusion that peer-to-peer file sharing will quickly be either eliminated or adapted by the RIAA.

Two observations about the introduction of new technologies are pertinent at this point. First, the relation of a technology to social practice is a complex, changing phenomenon that is not reducible to the goals of its developer. The inventors of audio recording (Edison's phonograph), for instance, intended the device for the preservation of voice (Sterne, 2003), yet the technology eventually became a means of mass-producing

copies of music (Attali, 1985). The conclusion one must draw from this case is that new technologies lead to disruptions of old ways of doing things – disruptions that are unanticipated and unpredictable – and so it has been and will continue to be with networked computing. The intended uses of the computer were to further social controls by the elite (ensure communications under conditions of nuclear war) (Attali, 1985); the outcome may be the overturning of certain systems of social control, that is, the culture industry.

The second observation is this: Digitization has thus far produced strong tendencies in two opposite directions concerning the question of the control of culture. First, digital culture enhances the ability of large institutions, such as the state and the corporation, to extend the reach of their information and management of the population. In the case of music, the culture industry has responded to digitization by attempting to extend its control over culture, attempting to limit sharply the ability of consumers to use cultural objects as they wish. Second, and at the same time, digital culture empowers individuals to have positions of speech that are difficult to monitor, to act upon cultural objects in ways not possible when these objects were available only in analogue form, to transform, reproduce, and disseminate information in a manner previously restricted to expensive central apparatuses such as broadcast facilities. Because of the ease and cheapness of the creation, reproduction, and distribution of cultural objects, users have extended their control over cultural objects such as by sharing files on peer-to-peer networks.

Networked computing confronts humanity with a dramatic choice of opposing possibilities: an Orwellian extension of governmental and corporate controls or a serious deepening of the democratization of culture. In the context, the most important question to ask about the DMCA is how society will establish practices around the digitization of cultural objects. Will it follow (1) the wishes of the culture industry, or (2) the practices exemplified in peer-to-peer networks, or (3) some combination of the two, or (4) the impulses of some other set of agents?

Fixed vs. variable cultural objects

On February 10, 2004 *The Los Angeles Times* reported that EMI blocked Brian Burton (also known as DJ Danger Mouse) from distributing 'The Grey Album', a composite blend (a 'mash-up' or sampling) of the Beatle's White Album and vocals from Jay-Z's 'The Black Album'. EMI's attempt to prevent the distribution of the album failed, only increasing its dissemination. Fred Goldring, a music-industry lawyer opines: EMI '. . . created

their own hell.' The Grey Album, the reporters continued, '. . . became probably the most widely downloaded underground indie record, without radio or TV coverage, ever. I think it's a watershed event.'(Healey & Cromelin, 2004, p. 43). The protest against EMI included 'Grey Tuesday' (Feb. 24th) when more than 150 websites offered downloadable versions of the album and an estimated 100,000 copies were downloaded on that day alone. Copyright experts observe that 'artists can't use a recognizable sample from someone else's recording unless the copyright holder grants permission' (ibid.). Goldring claims that '[a]rtists should have the absolute right to control their work. The problem is, how do you control that in the new world? . . . [But] what does [it mean to control one's work] in a world where everything can be digitized and transmitted around the world at the push of a button?' (ibid.).

EMI's action continues the effort of the music industry to repress sampling, an art form begun in the 1980s with hip-hop. Many artists advocate, contra EMI, 'open content' in digital culture, some who even elaborate an aesthetic based on the principle of variable cultural objects (Miller, 2004). Artists who have authorized the downloading, altering, and redistributing of their work include Bjork, Moby, Radiohead (posting loops on their website for downloading and using in other works) and Public Enemy '. . . allowing access to original master tracks of the vocals for open remixing . . .' (Vibe, 2004).

Modern society developed in the context-fixed cultural objects like books. These objects may be owned but they cannot be changed once they are produced. If they are altered, the user can alter only his or her copy. All previous and future copies are not affected by the alterations of the user. This is a limitation of analogue cultural objects. They can be mass-produced but only from fixed points of production, points that require great amounts of resources. The user cannot copy these objects in a mass form. This feature of cultural objects, their fixity, has had the further consequence of structuring society into two sharply divided groups, producers and consumers, each with their own capacities and limitations. Consumers were in a relatively passive position in relation to the objects.

Another feature of modern media culture is that, since reproduction required considerable resources, copies became commodities, that is to say, they were distributed through market mechanisms and acquired exchange values or prices. Analogue reproduction of cultural objects thus requires a type of material base that falls under the economics of scarcity. Air does not require a market because it is not scarce, at least if you live near the beach. Scarcity means that a group of people are

willing to pay for an object or service because that is the only way they can obtain it. They go to a market to find these objects and the price of the objects will reflect the ratio of the number of these objects available and the number of buyers who can pay for them. The economics of scarcity also means that if I sell you an object, I no longer possess it. Only one person may own a given object at any time.

Fixed cultural objects like books afforded certain advantages to consumers. The consumer, having bought the book, could read it anywhere he or she chose. The consumer could lend the book to a friend or resell it. The consumer could copy the book by handwriting and later by photocopying machines, which, though illegal, is impossible to police. The consumer could burn the book or throw it in the trash.

Digital cultural objects do not fall under the laws of scarcity and the market because they require almost no cost to produce, to copy and to distribute, and like ideas they do not diminish when they are given away. They are 'non-rivalrous'. There is no need for a capitalist market in the area of digital cultural objects and these objects need not become commodities. Their reproduction and distribution need not fall under the constraints of scarcity economics and indeed digital cultural objects *resist* market mechanisms.

Digitization of cultural objects changes each of these limitations or practices and expands the possible practices of analogue cultural objects concerning their production, reproduction, distribution, and use. It enables the inexpensive production of cultural objects such as sound recordings or moving images. It places in the hands of the consumer the ability to reproduce these objects very cheaply. And digital networks enable consumers to distribute cheaply cultural objects. It also enables the consumer of cultural objects to change them into new objects and to reproduce and to distribute them. Digitization also means the object is more difficult to destroy since it exists on the Internet. In short it changes the nature of the producer and the consumer, blurring the boundary between them. The consumer can now be a producer, reproducer, distributor, and creator of cultural objects. Thereby digital technology undermines the systems of controls that were associated with fixed cultural objects and brings control of culture itself into question by opening cultural objects to an unlimited process of alterations.

Copyright law

The DMCA (1998) extends the copyright law over analogue cultural objects to cover digital cultural objects, defined as texts, sounds, and images. Its main provision is to outlaw the 'circumvention of

technological measures used by copyright owners to protect their works and . . . tampering with copyright management information' (The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998: US Copyright Office Summary, p. 1). Thus programs designed to defeat copy protection (such as DeCSS and software that cancels the regional limitation DVD players) are now illegal both to create and to distribute.

The 1998 law also aligns US copyright law with recent agreements of the World Intellectual Property Organization acts. In addition it establishes internet service providers (ISPs) as 'safe harbors' in the sense that ISPs cannot be held liable for users' infringements but the ISP must enforce the rules against infringement and the RIAA is permitted to subpoena users. One provision of the law [Section 512(h) of the DMCA (17 USC 512)] gives copyright claimants the right to subpoena ISPs for the identities (name, address, e-mail address, phone) of users they allege are infringing their copyrights. It does not, however, let claimants of infringement get other information about user activity. The RIAA has until as of March 2004 used these subpoenas (almost 3000 to sue 382 individuals) to force ISPs to turn over the names of alleged file sharers, so the record labels can turn around and sue their fans.[4]

A US Court of Appeals, however, ruled in December 2003 that the RIAA cannot use subpoenas to compel ISPs to reveal the names of alleged music file swappers. The RIAA may only obtain a subpoena from a US District Court clerk's office after proving to a judge that it has sufficient evidence of infringement.[5] Finally the DMCA provides for some exceptions, such as when a computer breaks down.[6]

Copyright laws were enacted in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries first in Britain, then in the US and Western Europe as a response to the new technology of the printing press that made possible the mass reproduction of text (Rose, 1993). Copyright law is associated with patent law and trademark law but is somewhat different from them. Copyright law covered *the medium* in which inventions or acts of genius were embedded for reproduction. The medium of print required advanced technology and copyright law forbad anyone not authorized to use that technology for reproducing books and selling them.

Until the mid-twentieth century, copyright gave 'authors' a monopoly over their innovations for about 17 years but numerous changes in the law extends this to about 100 years and includes the descendants of authors.

Original copyright law also ensured that 'readers' had rights such as 'fair use' – the right to quote a work in order to critique it or make fun of it. This provision has been seriously curtailed by the DMCA.

Proposals by Microsoft and the culture industries known as Digital Rights Management and Trusted Computing would do away with much of fair use.

Copyright was adapted to new technologies of reproduction as they were invented and distributed in the areas of sound (the music industry, radio) and images (photography, film and television). In each case the rights of authors were whittled away in favor of control by media industries (Lury, 1993). Each new technology changed the circumstances of reproduction, changed the medium in which the cultural object was embedded and placed on the market, and called for changes in the nature and application of copyright law. For example, copyright law did not explicitly prohibit consumers from making copies (you will not find such a prohibition in books and they only were printed on LP labels after the spread of audio tape machines) because consumers did not have the capability of doing this in the media of print, film, early audio recordings, etc.

In general one can say that, as reproducers of cultural objects became larger due in part to the need for greater amounts of capital, copyright law increasingly diminished the power of the author/creator and increasingly reduced the rights and capacities of the consumer in both cases in favor of the media corporation (Vaidhyanathan, 2001). Copyright law is the chief means by which large corporations in general and music firms in particular attempt to control culture. In the words of Kimbrew McLeod, '. . . intellectual property law reinforces a condition whereby individuals and corporations with greater access to capital can maintain and increase unequal social relations' (McLeod, 2001, p. 1). Corporations use the threat of legal action systematically to stifle creativity even when the incident in question may fall fully within the 'fair use' doctrine. The system of copyright law is so far out of whack that countless examples, such as Time Warner's ownership of the song 'Happy Birthday to You', force the conclusion that, with regard to intellectual property, the legal structure no longer provides any semblance of justice. Hence all citizens have an obligation to violate copyright law whenever they can. Since the legislative branch of government is under the sway of the media industry, the only alternative available to foster democracy and promote creativity in the realm of culture is Henry David Thoreau's practice of civil disobedience. And digital technology has provided citizens with a practical means to carry out this protest. Digitization threatens the media corporations because one no longer requires great amounts of capital in order to produce, reproduce, modify, and distribute cultural objects.

Authors, artists, creators, innovators

Contra the music and film industries, copyright is not about remuneration for artists, authors, creators, and innovators, much less their heirs. Copyright was instituted to promote innovation in society, to improve the quality of life for all. In order to do that copyright provides a temporary monopoly for authors to designate firms to reproduce and distribute their work. The argument in copyright law is that the best way to insure the advance of science and the arts is to violate free market principles of competition and give authors the exclusive right to receive monetary rewards for their efforts. What benefits society is the innovation or creativity that is contained in the cultural object. Essential to democracy is the maximum dissemination of new ideas, new science, and new art. Original copyright laws foster this aim.

Contemporary copyright law, especially as modified by the DMCA, (mis)uses the privilege given to the artist and instead enables the cultural industry to reap large gains. Only as a secondary result of the current arrangements do some artists receive substantial royalties. (Many artists have sued the music industry, claiming systematic underpayment or cheating, and won in the courts.)

The music industry argues against peer-to-peer file sharing that such transmissions violate the artists' royalty benefits. There is no question but that file sharing bypasses author's royalties. But the question is how to remunerate innovators in a digital network system. And the answer is by no means that the network must be crippled so that the music industry continues to perform functions of reproduction and distribution that are no longer wanted or needed. There are three problems I shall highlight concerning the question of author royalties in the age of file sharing.

First, it is by no means clear that artists and innovators ought to receive compensation for the reproduction of their works. Each medium and art form is different in this regard. Musicians, for instance, certainly ought to be paid for their performances. Musicians' Unions have in some instances opposed recordings of music, especially when used in public locations like dance halls.[7] But who should be compensated for music in the case of reproduction technologies? Perhaps the engineers, the inventors of these technologies, ought to be paid royalties.

By way of contrast with the music industry, it is worth noting that in the case of film, cinemas provide a value added to the moving images/sound by displaying them in convenient locations, in comfortable circumstances, and on very large screens often with elaborate

sound systems. Such enhancements to the film experience are worth compensation. Although the advent of high-definition television (HDTV) and large screen TV monitors in home entertainment systems may challenge cinemas on this score, at least for those who can afford them. The film industry has to some extent learn a lesson from the experience of the music industry. The MPAA hired Kenneth Jacobson, former FBI agent, to head its anti-piracy efforts, who complained that downloading films on the Internet cut sharply the sales of DVDs and tapes. Yet the more serious aspect of film piracy concerns the unauthorized copying and selling of DVDs, according to Jacobson, amounting to more than 35 million in 2001. In some countries, he contended, 'film piracy has become so rampant in countries such as China, Russia, and Pakistan that the legal markets there have all but evaporated' (Muñoz and Healey, 2001 p. 28).

Second, file sharing, unlike some forms of so-called piracy, does not entail the sale of commodities. File sharing is a non-market exchange. It is not similar to early piracy in print where shops would reproduce books and sell them without authorization from or compensation to the author. Nor is it similar to Asian factories that copy CDs and DVDs and sell them cheaply in local markets. In fact digitization enables costless sharing of cultural objects. It resembles not violations of copyright but playing music in one's home with friends in attendance, friends who themselves did not necessarily buy the cultural object. One must account for the specificity of the medium of reproduction: digital reproduction, I would argue, does not fall within copyright at all because the kind of materiality of digital files is not characterized by the economics of scarcity. Unlike books, films and broadcasts, with digital media there is nothing to pay for.

Third, artists have always incurred debts to others. They are not the complete originators of works of art as copyright law pretends but, at least partially, parasites that rely upon previous cultural creations, collaborators, and workers in related fields. Artworks are as much or more the product of collective labor as they are the output of individual agents. No other culture in human history but the modern Western one has detached artists from their context and elevated them in sanctified celebrity. But this cultural practice defies the history of art, with its figures like Rubens, who painted only with a large staff of specialists, and filmmaking with its numerous casts of participants. The collective nature of the creative process is nowhere more evident than in music, from the borrowing practices of Handel and Vivaldi, to the 'coverings' of popular music as in Bob Dylan's reliance upon Woodie Guthrie, to the outright

montage-like pasting of bits of works in hip-hop and the practices of DJs (Poschardt, 1998, pp. 373–83; Hebdige, 1987) Art requires a cultural context of other art, numerous collaborators, and media producers. It also, let us not forget, requires audiences.

The figure of the artist as lone creator is today more than fiction serving the music industry as an alibi to abet its control of culture. With the increasing shift to digital culture, artworks, as we have seen, more and more take the form of variable cultural objects, in short, open content. The culture industries, as they have come to be institutionalized, cannot exist if cultural forms are developed as variable objects. Peer-to-peer file sharing is an important step in the articulation and elaboration of culture as open content.

For these reasons the question of file sharing is not as simple as the music industry would have us believe. A full understanding of the question requires some knowledge of the current practices of file sharing. To that end, I shall now present an overview of peer-to-peer file-sharing networks.

Peer-to-peer networks

Most discussions of the current condition of music distribution and file sharing begin and end with Napster (Lessig, 1999). Observers presume that the fate of file sharing on the Net rests with Napster. Since Napster was forced to shut down as a free network only to reemerge reborn, like the Phoenix, as a .com venture, these writers close the curtain on file sharing. Of late, some writers throw KaZaA into the mix but again conclude that since shared files have decreased recently from a high of 900,000,000 to 550,000,000, the era of the free distribution of music on the Internet is over.[8] But such is hardly the case. A robust, heterogeneous matrix of file sharing continues and evolves.

The circumstances of my own knowledge of file sharing are germane to this discussion. I first became aware of file sharing in the spring 1999 when I taught a class on Internet culture and learned of file sharing from my undergraduate students. Students were asked to present brief reports on their favorite websites. One student spoke about 'Scour.net', a website that contained links to downloadable mp3 music files. Even before Scour, file-swapping was rampant on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Usenet. But it is true that Napster vastly expanded the frequency of file sharing by its peer-to-peer architecture and ease of use. Shawn Fanning's program was vulnerable to legal attack because a central location maintained a database of files, acting as a server for clients who

used the program to find music to download. The newer 'killer applications' do not suffer this weakness. Programs like KaZaA and Justin Frankel's Gnutella for instance enable each user to make their own connections with other peers, coming much closer to a true peer-to-peer connection. One can find an overview of the many types of file-sharing programs and networks on sites like Slyck (http://www.slyck.com/).

The most basic network for file sharing remains IRC. Here, after invoking a client program, one makes direct connections with others and exchanges files while both parties remain online. There are also more elaborate sub-networks within the IRC domain. As long as the Internet functions as a decentralized system of networked computers, IRC will be difficult to police since there are no centralized sites to shut down. IRC however does suffer the limitation of scale: it does not provide the kind of networked information that facilitates mass interchange of information.

The next type of file sharing occurs on Usenet, also known as newsgroups. The original purpose of Usenet was the exchange of textual information, which was also true of IRC. For some time now, users developed methods of dividing up large music and even film files into chunks small enough to meet the size limitations of the Usenet system. These files are known as binaries and are bundled into groups. One downloads all of the parts and then reassembles them on one's computer, resulting in an mp3 file for music, a jpg file for images, or, for moving images, an avi file. Users then developed downloading programs that automatically assemble the parts into complete files. One difficulty with Usenet is the problem of finding the cultural object one is looking for amidst the profusion of thousands of groups. Faced with this limitation, users developed websites where other users upload reports on each group, indicating the available content. This is done continuously, day after day. As with IRC, it is hard to imagine how Usenet might be policed. Usenet services contain the files but downloaders simply indicate their choices, as one would do at a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site. No record is kept of who downloads what files. The shortcoming of Usenet is that the files are available for a limited time only, since the content of the groups changes every couple of days.

More popular than Usenet or IRC are the numerous networks like KaZaA that deploy genuine peer-to-peer programs. Among these are the eDonkey and eMule networks. In these cases each cultural object is assigned a 'hash' number, a long string of letters and numerals that identifies the film, game, ebook, program, or music album to all users connected to the network. The hash numbers are posted, under the file

name, at numerous sites on the Web. The user goes to the site, clicks on the file name and the client program pops up on the user's computer and searches the network for locations where the file exists. The program then downloads the file in small parts from several sites at the same time, something Napster could not do. Nor could Napster resume downloading if the site in question went offline or the user went offline, a feat the newer programs perform flawlessly. Finally the program assembles the parts into a complete file when it is finished with the download. While you are downloading a file or several files with eMule, others on the network are uploading the same file(s) from your computer. These complex, interlocking websites and programs are all free and developed (and continuously improved) by individual file-sharers.

Another, somewhat different system is Bram Cohen's Bit Torrent. This program also uses user identifiers for files so that the location that contains information about the file does not contain the file itself. Like the KaZaA and eDonkey systems, Bit Torrent allows multiple, simultaneous downloading of parts of a file. With Bit Torrent, a separate window opens for each download and uploads are limited to the file being downloaded.

Thousands of individuals create programs, maintain websites, upload hash numbers of 'releases' (cultural content they have digitized and put on their hard disks) and hundreds of thousands, more likely millions, download and share files. Participants in peer-to-peer networks are found across the globe although numbers of users are no doubt distributed in direct proportion to general Internet use. The peer-to-peer landscape is maintained as a public sphere outside the commodity system. Some sites do request donations that are voluntary. A distribution system for cultural objects thus subsists without the support of any large institution and with the strong opposition of those corporations that have controlled cultural objects since the development of technologies for the reproduction of information. Despite the moral and legal threats and actions of the MPAA and RIAA, peer-to-peer file sharing continues to flourish and even to expand. It seems that publicity about each new attack by the culture industries only makes more people aware of the peer-to-peer network and increases the number of participants. As one says in the movie business, no publicity is bad publicity for peer-to-peer networks.

Even as one marvels at the accomplishments of the peer-to-peer system, one may question the moral value of sharing cultural content. Surely downloading files is not a great creative act. Nor however is buying a CD in a retail outlet, it must be admitted. One question at stake in the peer-to-peer phenomenon is the value one attributes to commodity exchange in comparison to sharing. But a deeper question

still is the potential of peer-to-peer to become a dominant system of cultural exchange. An infrastructure is being set into place for a day when cultural objects will become variable and users will become creators as well. Such an outcome is not just around the corner since for generations the population has been accustomed to fixed cultural objects. But as we pass beyond the limits of modern culture, with its standardized, mass-produced consumer culture, we can anticipate more and more individuals and groups taking advantage of the facility with which digital cultural objects are changed, stored, and distributed in the network. A different sort of public space from that of modernity is emerging, a heterotopia in Foucault's (1986) term, and peer-to-peer networks constitute an important ingredient in that development, one worthy of safeguarding and promoting for that reason alone. If copyright laws need to be changed and media corporations need to disappear or transform themselves, this result must be evaluated in relation to a new possibility for radical democracy.

The politics of digital music

I prefer to analyze the contemporary situation not as an ethical problem, but as a political one: who shall benefit from the technical advances afforded by digitization? What limitations have to be imposed on the rest of society in order for the culture industry to maintain its pre-digital controls over cultural objects? Is this sacrifice worth it? Can capitalism continue to be legitimized in the area of cultural objects, if the technological advance of networked computing are held back in order to preserve the music industry in its current form?

In addition to corrupting our political process, the artist, the distribution media, retarding technical advances and delegitimizing capitalism, the music industry, to maintain its present degree of control over culture, would require new levels of surveillance over individuals that would seriously impinge on privacy (compelling ISPs to monitor their customer's downloads), reduce the scope of civil rights, and generally debase the basic freedoms of citizens. How is this so?

The beginnings of this process date back at least to the Bangermann white paper on copyright prepared for the World Intellectual Property Organization meeting in the mid-1990s. At the time the music industry was clueless about the implications of networked computing for their industry. The Clinton administration however was one degree less clueless. The Bangermann report attempted to impose US copyright standards on the world and to extend those standards to include digital technology. It seriously proposed that every copy of every cultural object fall under

copyright law, meaning that if you copy an e-mail from RAM to your hard disk that qualifies as a copy, if you copy from your hard disk to a floppy disk, this act also constitutes the act of copying. If you send a copy of a file to someone else, that also falls under the law. Each of these is a violation of copyright when the content has been copyrighted.

Why did the Clinton administration propose such an impossible expansion of intellectual property? For one reason, they made the proposal because cultural objects are second only to defense in export value of the US. A second reason is that the politicians were not aware that networked computing integrates copying within its functions and structures. Copying is automatic and continuous on the Internet. FTP, for example, is a basic function of digital networks. Copying is essential to the institutions of higher learning which developed networked computer. It represents a basic condition for intellectual freedom, scientific advance, and critical thinking. The Clinton administration easily trampled these hallmarks of a free society simply for the economic gain of some wealthy groups. The music industry, when it finally woke up and recognized the powers of peer-to-peer programs, was even more eager to destroy these features of our institutions.

Conclusion

We are clearly at a crossroads with regard to culture and politics under the legal regime of intellectual property law. Democratic institutions may either be undermined or radicalized as a result of the way copyright is extended or modified. It behooves the university, users/consumers, and others to resist the efforts of the culture industry in restricting the development of the digital domain. I argue we must not narrowly frame this resistance in terms of copyright law but in terms of media culture. We must invent an entirely new copyright law that rewards cultural creation but also fosters new forms of use/consumption and does not inhibit the development of new forms of digital cultural exchange that explore the new fluidity of texts, images, and sounds. Democracy would thereby be considerably extended.

The issue of the control of culture must be framed in relation to the kinds of subjects and identities it promotes. Digital cultural objects enable the constitution of subjects in broader and more heterogeneous forms than modern culture with its fixed objects and delimited identities. The new subjects might be capable of participating in radical democracy understood as the substantial empowerment of the population. At stake in the evolution of file sharing and other features of networked computing is a new culture of mobile and fluid selves, ones less beholden to the

constraints of modern and even postmodern subject positions. Such a culture of the self is well adapted to encounter in a propitious manner the two great historical tendencies of the twenty-first century: the emergence of intensified global exchanges of a transnational kind and the appearance of a new integration of humans and machines. These developments are not to be understood as utopian dreams but as the actuality we face. The salient questions are 'What will be our cultural resources in the confrontation of these fateful events?' and 'Will these emergent phenomena promote the development of a radical democratic politics?'

Notes

1. For a similar argument see Gillespie (2004).
2. The classic work on the history of the music industry since its inception is Sanjeck (1988).
3. Two studies that stand out on the question of control are Beniger (1986) and Kelly (1994), the former taking the position that digital technology furthers control by large corporations, the latter that this same technology undermines it.
4. Personal e-mail from Wendy Seltzer (lawyer for the Electronic Frontier Foundation), December 1, 2003.
5. Op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2004 p. 14.
6. A full analysis of the legal aspects of the DMCA is expounded well in Lawrence Lessig (2001).
7. See Thornton (1996) for a discussion of the resistance of the Musicians' Union in England to the use of recordings in dance halls.
8. A study by economists in 2004 disputes the claim of the RIAA that sales have been adversely affected by file-sharing. Felix Oberholzer-Gee of the Harvard Business School and Koleman S. Strumpf of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill maintain that file-sharing has no measurable effect on sales of CDs. They suppose that downloaders would not buy the CDs they are obtaining from peer-to-peer networks (Schwartz, 2004).

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13

Feminism, Communicative Capitalism, and the Inadequacies of Radical Democracy

Jodi Dean

Introduction

Under communicative capitalism, should feminists be radical democrats? If radical democracy entails an emphasis on the multiplicity of political identities engaging in agonistic struggle within a framework of liberal democratic norms and institutions, as it does for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), then the answer is no. The changing conditions of signification accelerated by networked information and communication technologies decrease the viability of the production of symbolic identities as a means of left political struggle. At the same time, the tenacity of neoliberalism as an economic project renders allegedly democratic institutions barriers to significant political change. Together, these two aspects of communicative capitalism indicate the limits radical democracy places on left political thought and point to the importance of reinvigorating socialism as a left political project.

What is communicative capitalism?

'Communicative capitalism' designates the way values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies (Dean, 2002; 2004; 2005). Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realized in and through intensifications of global telecommunications. This material realization exposes the inadequacy of these ideals for radical democratic politics in a world of digitalized information and communication networks, the world that facilitates and furthers the neoliberal economic project. Expanded and intensified communicativity has neither enhanced opportunities for the articulation of political struggles nor enlivened radical democratic

practices – although it has exacerbated left fragmentation, amplified the voices of right-wing extremists, and delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers. Instead of leading to more equitable distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of screens and spectacles undermines the political efficacy of and conceals the economic devastation confronting most of the world's peoples. In communicative capitalism, rhetorics of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich (see Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005).

Saskia Sassen's (1998) research on the impact of economic globalization on sovereignty and territoriality clarifies how the speed, simultaneity, and interconnectivity of telecommunications networks produce massive distortions and concentrations of wealth. Not only does the possibility of super-profits in the finance and services complex lead to hypermobility of capital and the devalorization of manufacturing, but financial markets themselves acquire the capacity to discipline national governments. Moreover, as David Harvey (2005) explains, neoliberalism's endeavor 'to bring all human action into the domain of the market' requires 'technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyze, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace' (p. 3). Sassen's and Harvey's work thus provides powerful empirical evidence for the convergence between networked telecommunications and globalized neoliberalism.

In a particularly invidious twist of the knife, attempts to adjust to and survive within the debt crises, structural adjustments, privatizations, and overall diminishment of opportunity brought about by globalized neoliberalism themselves further the encroachments of information technologies and the market logics accompanying them into more domains of life. Even progressive activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (that is to say, even those fully aware of the limits of information technology and of the role of networked communications in neoliberal globalization) find themselves working within the terms set by neoliberalism as they struggle to help poor women acquire entrepreneurial opportunities, become more efficient, gain access to information networks, exercise rights to communication, and so on (see, for example, Thas, 2005). Similarly, within the mainstream politics of digitalized, nominally constitutionally democratic countries such as the United States, the standards of a finance- and consumption-driven

entertainment culture set the very terms of democratic organization and practice. How can these terms be changed when challenges to them in fact strengthen the very systems they aim to contest?

Understood as an economic and political formation, then, communicative capitalism highlights the particular trap set by a neoliberalism dependent on global information and communication networks: the very possibility of economic sustainability and political resistance outside of the terms and conditions set by neoliberalism seems to have been foreclosed. The remarkable quality of this hegemonic formation consists in the way that its materialization formats seemingly counterhegemonic political practices into programs that strengthen, accelerate, and intensify communicative capitalism as a system.

Global participants: Consumers and NGOs

One way communicative capitalism formats politics is through the restructuring of political space into divisions between one and all, the personal and the global, thereby occluding the continued relevance of class, local, state, and regional affiliations in producing specific visions of both the personal and the global. Rhetorics celebrating the political potential of information and communication technologies oscillate between images of the empowered person pointing and clicking her way through a world of information and reports of the responsive engagement of global networks of NGOs. Yet, at the sites of both singular person and NGO network, the technologies and practices lauded as enhancing democracy appear in their depoliticizing and deradicalizing actuality. Their failure thus indicates the need for an approach to political change that stops paying lip service to democratic norms and institutions and undertakes instead the demanding project of envisioning another politics.

Looking more specifically at the networked person, we see that even as information age enthusiasts celebrate the new forms of participation globally networked communications enable, this enthusiasm focuses on opportunities for wired citizens to sign petitions, inform themselves, share photographs, videos, and music, contribute to causes or campaigns, and register their opinions on millions of blogs, online forums, and listservs, by laptop, phone, or handheld communication device.[1] Corresponding to this ideal participant is the consumer, a ready recipient of multiple messages from friends and advertisers. Just as the global participant joins virtual struggles anywhere she chooses, so does the global consumer make

purchases, consume ads, and contribute to the circulating content of communicative capitalism.

This image of the mobile global consumer-participant is deeply problematic. Frictionless, digitalized mobility is a privilege of citizenship and economic class. The economic and political activities of this fantastic consumer-participant, moreover, are virtually indistinguishable. In fact, these activities shift into forms of passivity, suggesting engagement and disengagement simultaneously as shopping and political commitment are manifest in one and the same action of signing, clicking, or registering as a member.

The singular consumer-participant engaged in digitized exchanges is only one site of communicative capitalism. Another is the NGO network, the summit and conference circuit of transnational activism. NGOs became agents and sites of politics as activists in the eighties and nineties responded to the ever increasing influence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as engines of globalized neoliberalism by shifting their attention away from ineffective state governments and toward international agencies (refer Davis, 2006, p. 75). Such agencies, aware of if not directly responsible for the evisceration of public sector projects under stringent structural adjustment policies, began to work with private foundations and NGOs on specific, contract-based projects.

Research on the networked interactions of NGOs makes clear that under communicative capitalism political activity on a global scale is arranged through a postdemocratic governmentality (Dean, Anderson, & Lovink, 2006). As we explain in the introduction to *Reformatting Politics*, 'postdemocratic' refers to the fact that information and communication technologies enable affiliations and engagements that exceed the terms of the democratic imaginary. NGOs replace democratic suppositions of representation, accountability, and legitimacy with a different set of values, such as subsidiarity, 'multistakeholderism', expertise, and reputation management. Michel Foucault's (1991) term 'governmentality' designates the interaction of codes of conduct, strategies of power, and forms of knowledge that produce the subjects and objects of networked politics. The utility of the concept stems from the way it brings together political knowledges crucial to the practice, systematization, and rationalization of a field to be governed (Lemke, 2002). Insofar as governmentality involves knowledge of what one is trying to produce, it has a reflexivity helpful for grasping the impact of networked communications technologies on political practices.

Analyzing global women's movements, Carol Barton (2004) observes how, since the end of the cold war, much activism has moved into the NGO arena. Rather than engaging in mass-based organizing strategies, NGO activists engage in public–private partnerships to fund specific projects, participate in UN sponsored summits and conferences that issue reports, pass resolutions, and seek to pressure national governments, and try to build and consolidate information networks that enhance their reputations as experts and stakeholders. Both the conferences and the networks enable feminist activists to develop their analyses of gender and health, development, and security (among many other issue areas), and to keep these items on a global agenda. At the same time, insofar as this agenda is not metaphorical but refers to the actual shape and content of specific conferences as well as the determination of their outcomes, activist practices necessarily involve strategic and tactical maneuverings with respect to different NGOs, feminist and non-feminist alike. Within a setting of global conferences, competing bidding for funding, and increased cooperation with states as paid advisors and consultants, these maneuverings are part of a more general political deradicalization.

In this vein, Gita Sen (2005) describes the trap facing feminist participants at the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the 1999 Beijing Conference on Women. In the heavily neoliberal economic environment, feminists were presented with the false choice of capitalism or patriarchy. Sen explains that religious conservatives (particularly the Vatican) sought to appear as champions of the global south against northern recalcitrance on issues of trade, debt, financing, and development:

> On the one hand, complex and poorly regulated processes of globalization appeared as the new form of a free market juggernaut creating deep and growing inequalities of wealth and income, and in which rising numbers of impoverished people, especially women, were being marginalized from access to secure livelihoods. On the other hand, one set of reactions to globalization was the strengthening of national, religion-based, ethnic or other identities in which the assertion of 'traditional' gender roles and systems of authority and control was central.

The environment in which these conferences took place thus induced feminist activists to compromise and develop (generally temporary)

alliances. Yet, a compensatory benefit was the accrual of 'considerable expertise and credibility'.

The terrain upon which negotiating occurred changed for feminist activists once George W. Bush entered the White House, increasing pressure for further deradicalization and compromise. As Sen (2005) writes, 'There is no "clash of civilizations" on reproductive and sexual rights and gender equality between the neocons and the religious conservatives.' Not only has the Bush administration taken over the Vatican's role as chief opponent to gender equality and reproductive health but it has also been closely allied with Islamic fundamentalists. In the wake of neoliberal privatizing of even minimal public health-care systems across the globe, such conservative alliances at the transnational level – from the public–private partnerships to their pressures on the various agencies within the UN system – have disastrous results for poor women worldwide. The combination of economic neoliberalism and religious conservatism impacts the agendas of donors and corporate funders which in turn conditions the shape of possible alliances. How, for example, will NGOs focused on poverty and development link up with or integrate the concerns of NGOs emphasizing women's reproductive health, particularly in a competitive funding environment? (see Barton, 2005). And, what happens to feminist commitments to the larger spectrum of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered) rights in a pro-children, pro-family setting? Donna Murdock's (2003) research on NGOs working under neoliberal economic pressures in Columbia suggests not only a retrenchment from feminist politics but a more disturbing overall delegitimation of feminism.

In sum, the combination of the neoliberal economic environment and religiously conservative political environment in which NGOs work makes sense of their postdemocratic governmentality, their shift away from representation and toward expertise, an expertise that extends from financial knowledge, technological knowledge, knowledge of procedures, rules, and best practices to knowledge of the language, ideals, and principles guiding government and private funders. As with the global participant-consumer so with the NGO network do we find neoliberalism providing the economic frame for our current depoliticized, deradicalized, postdemocratic constellation of forces. Under communicative capitalism, the very arrangements heralded as advancing democracy serve neoliberalism instead, rendering ostensibly progressive practices of organization and resistance into the very mechanisms whereby elite power is consolidated.

I turn now to two additional aspects of the current conjuncture: the decline of patriarchy and the decline of symbolic efficiency. Attention to each further indicates the challenges communicative capitalism poses for radical democracy.

The end of patriarchy

In his pathbreaking study of the networked society, Manuel Castells (1997) establishes the fact that communicative capitalism has been marked by the end of patriarchalism. This does not mean that women are no longer victims of violence, oppression, and discrimination. On the contrary, patriarchal religions and societies are ever more visible as powerful forces endeavoring to restrict and control the lives of women and girls. The current appeal of fundamentalisms is in part their promise of restored power and cohesion to the patriarchal family in the wake of the improved condition of women and the heightened economic insecurity wrought by neoliberalism. Nevertheless, Castells's overview of survey data from across the globe makes clear how the end of the twentieth century witnessed 'what amounts to a mass insurrection of women against their oppression throughout the world, albeit with different intensity depending on culture and country' (p. 135). Some examples: fewer women marry and when they do they marry later and are more likely to divorce; more children are born to single women and there are more single-parent and single-member households; women make up an increasing percentage of the paid global workforce. There has been a general delinking of marriage, family, heterosexuality, and sexual activity. Overall, then, a key feature of networked societies is a decline in the significance of the patriarchal family; it's become one option among an increasingly diversified set of living and working relations.

What this means in the United States, the United Kingdom, and much of Europe is that contemporary subjects, rather than conforming to stereotypes of responsible men in the public sphere and caring women in the private, are encouraged to challenge gender norms and boundaries. Men and women alike are enjoined to succeed in the work force and in their family lives, to find fulfilling careers and spend quality time with their children. Networked communication technologies (high speed internet, cell phones) enable parents to work harder even as they attend to familial relationships. Similarly, emphases on the value of diverse cultural and ethnic traditions have replaced earlier injunctions to assimilate. These emphases find material support in

consumer goods ranging from clothing and accessories targeted to specific demographic groups, to film, television, and print media, to, more recently, drugs and health plans designed for particular populations. Accompanying the decline in patriarchy is thus a shift in the understanding of social membership away from the worker/citizen and toward the consumer or, put in more general terms, a shift from symbolic to imaginary identities.

What disciplinary society prohibited, contemporary consumerism demands. In place of symbolically anchored identities (structured in terms of conventions of gender, race, work, and national citizenship), we encounter today injunctions to imagine ourselves in terms of any number of identities. Corresponding to emphases on challenging gender norms are injunctions to explore new forms of fulfillment. Self-help books tell us not just *how to achieve* sexual ecstasy, spiritual fulfillment, and a purpose-driven life – they tell us *to achieve* sexual ecstasy, spiritual fulfillment, and a purpose-driven life. Likewise accompanying the availability of consumer products tailored to specific ethnicities, lifestyles, and even politics are injunctions to be oneself, to create and express one's free individuality. And, if one does not like the self that one is, one can get a makeover. Capitalism provides the necessary support in the form of the ever new experiences and accessories we use for refashioning ourselves.

Emphasizing the injunctions to excess pervading communicative capitalism, Žižek (1999; 2003) describes consumerism as permeated by the superego injunction to enjoy, a command that is ultimately perverse in that it commands us to realize an impossible *jouissance*. Such superego compulsion results in overwhelming guilt and anxiety. On one hand, we are guilty both when we fail to live up to the superego's injunction and when we follow it. On another, we are anxious before the enjoyment of the other. Given our inabilities to enjoy, the enjoyment of the other seems all the more powerful, all the more threatening. An ever present reminder that someone else has more, is more fulfilled, more successful, more attractive, more spiritual, the other makes our own lack all the more present to us.

That the fragility of contemporary subjects means others are experienced as threats helps make sense of the ready availability of the imaginary identity of the victim – one of the few positions from which one can speak. In the terms provided by the so-called war on terror, to be 'civilized' today is to be a victim – a victim of fear of terrorism, a victim that has to be surveilled, searched, guarded, and protected from unpredictable violence. In all these cases, the imaginary identity of the victim

authorizes the subject to speak even as it shields it from responsibility toward another (see Žižek, 2003, pp. 166–68). The victim role, in other words, is one wherein the subject who speaks relies on and presupposes the other as an object enjoying in its stead, and, moreover, as threatening, even unbearable, in that enjoyment.

Intensified efforts at regulation as well as a proliferation of fears, anxieties, and warnings accompany these new opportunities for personal, sexual, and reproductive freedom, threatening to forestall precisely those freedoms fought for throughout the twentieth century. Numerous experts in health and well-being issue persistent (and often contradictory) warnings about diet and exercise. The instructions regarding moderation and balance, the careful regimes and guidance we come under as we navigate late capitalism, are not symbolic norms. They are regulations that lack a claim to normative authority, but are instead installed by committees, experts, and pundits. Everyone knows they are ultimately contestable, carrying no symbolic weight. These regulations, then, are not rules in any strong sense. Rather, they are regulations of the very mode of transgression (Žižek, 2003, p. 56). This makes sense when we recognize the way these regulations fail to provide any real breathing space, any relief from the injunction to enjoy. In fact, they function much more perversely insofar as they never fail to remind us that we really are not enjoying properly, we really are not doing anything right. They are thus another version of the superego injunction that torments us, pushing us to have more and be better while always reminding us that we have already failed.

Religious conservatives seeking to reinstall old sexual prohibitions exemplify an additional combination of regulation and *jouissance* all too common in communicative capitalism. Their seeming adherence to law is sustained by a superego injunction to transgress contemporary regulations. Organizing themselves via a fascination with the sexual enjoyment of same sex couplings, opponents of gay marriage, in the name of family values, free their congregations to hate and encourage them to find and weed out homosexual attraction.

In sum, a central paradox of the decline of patriarchy appears in the way that contemporary imperatives to freedom produce radical attachments to domination and submission. We can understand such attachments in terms of a simple dynamic of transgression. If authorities say do not do X, then doing X will provide enjoyment (because prohibition relies on the fantasy that were it not for the prohibited object, one would enjoy). Conversely, if authorities say do X, then not doing X provides enjoyment. For example, if one perceives 'political correctness' to

be a primary rule for interacting in a diverse society, one might get off on sexist and racist speech. Or, if one thinks that current society celebrates sexual promiscuity, one might endorse virginity not simply as an ethical choice but as a sacrificial choice that itself provides enjoyment. Thus, Žižek insists that contemporary subjects confront an 'obscene need for domination and submission'. Powerful and widespread examples of such attachments to domination are enthusiasm for coercive law, that is, for strict sentencing, the death penalty, and zero tolerance toward lawbreakers. Likewise, impulses to submission, the surprising willingness of many to accept even the most unconvincing pronouncements in a time of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity, also point to a need for relief from the injunction to decide for oneself when one has no grounds for choosing. Submission enables someone else to do what needs to be done for us, to be the object or instrument of our will thereby abetting our escape from the pressures of guilt and responsibility.

The decline of symbolic efficiency

Correlative to the pervasive intrusion of superego enjoyment is a decline in the efficiency of symbolic norms, what Žižek refers to as the 'decline of symbolic efficiency' or 'collapse of the big Other' (1999, pp. 322–34). A first way to think about the 'decline of symbolic efficiency' is as a societal version of the uncertainty principle in physics: we can not be certain; we can only predict; and, we encounter daily invocations of low-probability high-risk disasters – terrorist attacks, asteroids, airplane crashes, avian flu, mad-cow disease. Such a fundamental uncertainty characterizes the relation of many people in digital cultures to their world; there is always the possibility of something unexpected, some kind of chance or contingency – 'I might get better'; 'I might get mugged'; 'I might get lucky' (we should note as well that emphasis on the low-risk uncertainties plaguing the privileged displaces attention from the chaotic conditions of daily life for those living in poverty; in this vein, concern with avian flu redirects attention and resources away from tuberculosis, malaria, HIV, etc.).

Such indeterminacy leads to a second way to understand the notion of the decline of symbolic efficiency, that is, in terms of the multiplicity and indeterminacy of meaning. That a symbol or identity works in one place, does not mean it works in another place. For example, feminism for one person might mean bombing Afghanistan because of the way the Taliban treats women. Feminism for another might entail resisting a pro-life, pro-family government that blocks access to adequate

birth control and information about ways to prevent HIV transmission and that participates in the demonization of lesbians and gay men. The notion of the decline of symbolic efficiency also refers to the way that arguments or authorities persuasive in one context have no weight in another, primarily because there are lots of different kinds of authorization. Likewise, for many in networked societies, the identity we perform in one setting has little to do with the ones we perform in others. There is not an automatic connection or coordination among contexts. In sum, the decline of symbolic efficiency indicates the way that no master signifier holds everything together; instead, meanings slip and slide along loose chains of signification or, better, cease to matter as clicking on words can open up ever differentiated windows into their use.

Žižek's notion of the decline of symbolic efficiency should be read together with Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's (2000) account of the shift from disciplinary society to the society of control. Disciplinary logics worked primarily within the institutions of civil society to produce subjects. But now these institutions – the nuclear family, union, school, neighborhood – are in crisis. The old political subject – the citizen-subject of an autonomous political sphere, the disciplined subject of civil society – can no longer be said to exist. Racial, ethnic, and sexual identifications are less fixed, less stabile, less available as determinate subject positions. In their place, we find fluid, hybrid, and mobile subjectivities who are undisciplined, who have not internalized specific norms and constraints, and who can now only be controlled. In psychoanalytic terms, we can say that symbolic identity is increasingly meaningless in the society of control. And what we have instead are imaginary identities sustained by excess *jouissance*. That is, the society of control places limits on the mobility and fluidity of contemporary hybrid identities. These limits, however, are not those installed by a master signifier or symbolic law. Rather, they are knots of excessive enjoyment typically figured as fascinating/repulsive consumers and criminals (see Passavant, 2005).

Thus, we see again that the neoliberal economy does not provide symbolic identities, sites from which we see ourselves, as loci of collective attachment. Rather, it provides opportunities for new ways for me to imagine myself, a variety of lifestyles that I can try and try on. This variety and mutability makes my imaginary identity extremely vulnerable – the frames of reference that give it meaning and value are forever shifting; the others who can rupture it appear at any moment and their successes, their achievements, their capacities to enjoy call mine into question: I could have had more; I could have really enjoyed.

The proliferation of imaginary identities that accompanies the decline of symbolic efficiency helps make sense of the central dilemma facing feminist theory, namely, the widely recognized fact that feminism does not speak for women. The response to the perceived failure of the term to stand in for the multiplicity of women's experiences has been to multiply the term itself, to add an 's' so as to designate the multiple versions or forms of feminism. Yet, rather than solving the problem, the 's' is simply another way of registering it. It is the other side of the same coin, the same problem of the decline of symbolic efficiency. And, worse, insofar as it misrecognizes itself as a solution, it proceeds as if the various versions of feminism were, one, symbolic identities themselves, and, two, in a non-antagonistic relation with each other.

Feminism appears today in the form of multiple feminisms: lesbian feminism, postcolonial feminism, liberal feminism, etc. Yet, none of these terms is stable. Each is immediately complicated by its intersections with others such that any momentary stability it might achieve is imaginary, fantastic, unable to serve even as a placeholder. On the one hand, this point is already well established. What if anything holds multiple feminisms together if not a refusal to speak for women? In fact, this refusal is admired. The strength of multiple feminisms allegedly comes from its fluidity and flexibility, its capacity to shift and lack of a center. Yet, on the other hand, this very refusal is an explicit acknowledgment of the failure of even that feminism to which an 's' has been added to establish anything like a political identity. Left in the wake, then, are fluidity and flexibility for their own sakes, the very fluidity and flexibility, urge for newness or revolutionizing impulse, characteristic of capitalism (see Hennessy, 2000, pp. 29–36).

Capitalism structures the terrain upon which these multiple identities proliferate and struggle. Global capitalism, Žižek points out, 'created the conditions for the demise of "essentialist" politics and the proliferation of new multiple political subjectivities' (Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000, p. 319). Movements unfold in the spaces opened up (and closed off) in the course of the expansions and intensifications of capitalism, expansions and intensifications that are themselves manifestations of class struggle, both in terms of gains made by labor and in terms of capitalist successes. Capitalism has quickly adapted to these movements, incorporating previously transgressive urges and turning culture into its central component (Žižek, 2000, pp. 13, 25).

A further consequence of feminist embrace of multiplicity is that many who think and write as specific kinds of feminists are critical of attempts to use the term without qualification. Any use of an overarching symbolic identity seems an unjustifiable constraint or violence that necessarily forecloses in advance possibilities for freedom or contestation. Yet, the very attempt to avoid constraint results in a profound depolitication. It enables the 's' of multiple feminisms to proliferate so as to include as feminists 'pro-life feminists' who oppose abortion and 'power feminists' who celebrate women's successes in the market appear.

Describing feminist inclusivity, Phyllis Chesler (in the context of her own espousal of a feminist militarism siding with George W. Bush's war against Islamic terrorists) writes, 'Feminists are Republicans and Democrats, right-wing conservatives and left-wing radicals; feminists are religious and anti-religious, anti-abortion and pro-abortion, anti-pornography and pro-pornography, anti-gay-marriage and pro-gay marriage. Feminists come in all ages and colors; belong to every caste, gender, class, and religion; and live everywhere' (2006, p. B12). Chesler's bizarrely inclusive list occludes the fundamental incompatibility between its items. Feminist politics thus appears as a menu of options available to be consumed, a micro version of the neoliberal capitalism in which it is set. This feminist pluralism precludes drawing a line, acknowledging and distinguishing between visions of feminism that are strictly opposed to each other. Adding an 's' treats as equal political positions that are not, failing to account for, say, the radical difference between poor and rich women or versions of feminism that accept rather than contest global capitalism. It prevents us from calling into question and emphasizing specific differences as elements in larger, systematic patterns of violence.

Thus, feminists have been grappling for some time now with what Žižek understands as the decline of symbolic efficiency. All too aware of the failure of feminism to provide a symbolic identity from which women might mobilize politically, feminists have pluralized feminism. Yet, this very pluralization has resulted in the proliferation of imaginary identities even less capable of providing loci for political identification: in fact, they reiterate the preoccupation with fluidity and newness characteristic of global capitalism, seem themselves to be impermissibly rigid and constraining, and contribute to a profound depoliticizing of feminism by failing to attend to antagonisms between various feminisms. It is no wonder, then, that feminist activists working in NGOs find themselves tactically drawn to political practices that eschew identity formation and

concentrate instead on specific issues – reproduction, health, communication, violence, trafficking, poverty, development, etc.

The inadequacies of radical democracy

I have described the current conjuncture in terms of communicative capitalism, emphasizing, first, the division between the global consumer-participant imagined in enthusiastic depictions of the political possibilities opened up by information and communication technologies and the fluid, responsive, transnational networks of NGOs. Not only is the work of NGOs formatted within a postdemocratic governmentality but the active passivity of a person encountering (and producing) imaginary worlds of her own choosing on the screens of her mediated environment suggests a depoliticized subjectivity, one for whom politics is simply a set of options to be consumed. Second, I have attended to the declines of patriarchy and symbolic efficiency as crucial components of communicative capitalism. Here I introduced two additional factors vital to understanding the current moment: the prevalence of the superego injunction to enjoy and concomitant invigoration of anxieties, insecurities, and attachments to domination and the replacement of symbolic identities with imaginary ones incapable of anchoring political identifications. I turn now to specific problems that this conjuncture poses for radical democracy and highlight, one, the limits of an appeal to existing norms and institutions, and, two, the inadequacy of an account of politics that continues to rely on identities.

While there is much that I admire in Mouffe's *On the Political*, her basic position (which, as she admits bears a certain similarity to that of John Rawls) accepts the current framework of liberal democratic institutions. She writes: 'A democratic society requires the allegiance of its citizens to a set of shared ethico-political principles, usually spelled out in a constitution and embodied in a legal framework, and it cannot allow the coexistence of conflicting principles of legitimacy in its midst' (2005, p. 122). There is something oddly fetishistic in Mouffe's advocation of political forms that are clearly not working: I know that elections, voting, and parliamentary governance has crumbled, failed to stop neoliberal economic globalization, brought horrible right-wing reactionaries to power, nevertheless, I believe democracy can get better! On this point, then, I agree with Žižek when he observes that democracy is a limit to left thought, one that prevents proper attention to the more fundamental problem of capitalism (Žižek, 2002). To the extent

that Mouffe emphasizes that 'a democratic society cannot treat those who put its basic institutions into question as legitimate adversaries' and puts herself on the side of democracy, she relies implicitly on an antagonistic divide between radical democracy and a left politics focused on the economy (2005, p. 120). That is, she defends a political order that is the current form for neoliberal hegemony rather than allowing for the transformation or dissolution of this form through nondemocratic political means. I agree with Mouffe's claim that drawing a line between the legitimate and the illegitimate is a political decision. Yet, I oppose a decision that draws this line so as to shelter political forms protecting entrenched economic inequalities, particularly in the name of democracy.

How did what was supposed to be an account of radical democracy become so conformist? We can approach this question by considering the larger argument that Mouffe developed with Ernesto Laclau in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. She draws from that discussion in *On the Political*, emphasizing the formation and confrontation of collective identities in the course of hegemonic struggle as well as the ineradicability of antagonism. At the same time, she argues for the possibility of downgrading antagonism into agonism via 'a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries' (p. 21). Within the terrain demarcated by these procedures, adversaries can offer competing visions of the we/they distinction 'which is the condition of possibility for the formation of political identities' (p. 16). Her argument, then, is for democracy as a political formation that enables adversaries to clearly present themselves as such. Rooted in a distinction between us, those who accept democratic procedures, and them, those who do not, radical democracy thus denotes a form of government that enables competition between visions of collective identity.

Mouffe's version of democracy is a pragmatic one concerned with the problems of political violence and extremism that emerge when established political modes tend to consensus and fail to allow for the expression of alternatives (pp. 63–70). Yet, it reintroduces precisely that consensus model it explicitly rejects. Recall, Mouffe argues that democratic institutions should allow for the emergence of clear adversaries. This means, then, that she is advocating for a terrain upon which her opponent can emerge and fight as well. So, oddly, Mouffe is in the position of arguing for the advantage of someone whom she thinks is fundamentally mistaken. Her position could thus suggest a certain perversity, an enjoyment of process and struggle for its own sake. She is happy to advocate a terrain that could lead to her defeat because

she is not concerned with any particular outcome, just with the process; any one outcome is just as good as any other when it is the product of struggle. Or, maybe Mouffe's view is less perverse than it is tactical: Mouffe does not *really* think that her adversary might win, so she is comfortable in proposing this vision of democracy. More plausibly, perhaps Mouffe thinks that she is providing a metalevel political description, a model for politics in diverse, contentious societies. At this metalevel, her argument is politically neutral, a position that anyone, right or left, could reasonably accept. But, if this is the case, then Mouffe has repeated as a defense of her notion of democracy the same argument from consensus that she rightly rejects when it is made on more universalistic grounds. Indeed, she urges 'democratic procedures *accepted by the adversaries*' (emphasis added). For all its attention to antagonism, then, Mouffe's argument is insufficiently partisan, insufficiently divisive. Or, less generously, it is covertly partisan – again because of the way that it ultimately protects economic arrangements benefiting the economic and financial interests of the most well-off (see Žižek, 2004, pp. 88–98). We have, then, two possible answers to the questions regarding the lost radicality of radical democracy: the implicit embrace of consensus and the acceptance of an institutional terrain premised on the exclusion of the economy from political struggle.

It may also be the case that radical democracy loses radicality by remaining focused on the construction of political identities. For all her attention to multiplicity and plurality, Mouffe is oddly silent on the different possibilities for political action. Instead, she adheres to a notion of political struggle as based ultimately on the elaboration of the antagonism between us and them. Although class struggle involves such an elaboration, is it necessarily the case that collective identities remain at the center of the political field? In a rapidly shifting media environment or in the complexities of urban war zones, identifications may morph and mutate so rapidly as to be politically inconsequential. Similarly, the infusion of brands as themselves identities adds a level of complexity missing in the focus on political identities: if brands provide identities that can claim allegiance and mobilize consumers, then the formation of a we/they distinction loses its specifically political flavor, itself becoming depoliticized and no longer capable of serving as a primary determinant for the specificity of the political as such. Additional problems with Mouffe's focus on collective identities appear when we recognize how political formations emerge along lines of issues not readily concretizable as identities, as in, for example, ecological and environmental matters (see Marres, 2006). To say that political

successes in these domains require the elaboration of an identity misses the character of contemporary issue politics – precisely the sorts of politics with its shifts and compromises currently dominating the NGO scene. Contestations and compromises between and among groups meeting at global summits, drafting papers, and bidding on contracts are not well described as views that aim to stand for the impossible totality of the social. To be sure, I am not endorsing the postdemocratic governmentality of NGOs. Rather, I am emphasizing the fact that contemporary politics operates in modes that cannot be reduced to the formation of identities.

I can further specify the problems with a view of politics that prioritizes the formation of collective identities by turning to Laclau's claim that 'the construction of a "people" is the *sine qua non* of democratic functioning' (2005, p. 169). Laclau highlights the importance of empty signifiers for politics: they 'can play their role only if they signify a chain of equivalences, and it is only if they do so that they constitute a people' (p. 171). If empty signifiers cannot signify a chain of equivalences, then they cannot constitute a people. Laclau's argument proceeds as if this possibility of signification is available for emancipatory (rather than right wing) struggles. I am not so sure. I take the notion of the decline of symbolic efficiency to designate a conjuncture wherein signifiers are so unstably knit together that they are held together, at best, momentarily by nuggets of enjoyment (*objet petit a*). And I have situated this decline within communicative capitalism, that is, within the highly mediated networks produced through global information technologies. These constantly changing, sometimes intersecting networks provide multiple terrains for the rapid formatting, deployment, contestation, and revision of signifiers. We might think here of the photographs of Abu Ghraib prisoners tortured by American soldiers. Even these horrifying images participated in multiple signifying chains, standing in for what the terrorists responsible for 9/11 deserved, for the hypocrisy of American claims to love freedom, and for the obscenity of the gaze behind the camera in a spectacular age. The combination of the decline of symbolic efficiency and its setting in communicative capitalism thus indicates that, rather than having symbolic identities available for political mobilization, we find weaker, yet more volatile imaginary identities. As Žižek often notes, moreover, the collapse of the symbolic enables an alliance between the imaginary and the real, a situation wherein fears and fantasies can empower ever greater extremes of violence. This suggests the greater likelihood

of signifiers available for fundamentalist or far right deployment insofar as these forces flourish by inciting fear and hatred.

It is not surprising that radical democracy meets its limits in communicative capitalism. Laclau's own discussion in *On Populist Reason* is scattered with examples from neighborhoods, people in physical proximity to one another, struggles rooted in communities and nations. His theory retains traces of political thinking tied to a specific moment of the nation-state and less applicable to the highly mediated environments traversing and producing contemporary political collectivities within and between states. Mouffe is more attentive to new problems of cosmopolitanism and internationalism. Yet, this attention is purchased at the cost of continued acceptance of global capitalism as an uncontested political terrain.

Conclusion

I have argued that radical democracy is inadequate to the challenges of communicative capitalism. What, then, is better? And, what sorts of politics are more suited to feminist concerns? Adequate responses to these questions cannot consist simply in answers but necessarily point toward determined projects, projects that oppose neoliberal capitalism and the conservatism of religious fundamentalism. To my mind, oppositional socialist feminism, particularly as described by Lynne Segal (1999), provides an excellent frame for such a project. As socialism, it is attuned to the necessity of collective approaches to securing fundamental economic needs and thus retains as a vital political alternative the possibility of rejecting current political institutions. As feminism, it confronts those conservative forces that respond to the dislocations of global capitalism by seeking to reinvigorate patriarchal notions of the family. As socialist feminism, it emphasizes the fact that globally women bear the burdens of neoliberal economic strategies, thus providing a compelling location for an opposition to capitalism that does not reinforce conservative and nationalist political movements.

Since socialist feminism is a political project, not an answer and not a solution, how it might unfold is impossible to foresee. What is clear, though, is that conceptually it better accords with an understanding of the political in terms of antagonism than does radical democracy. Why? Because socialist feminism recognizes this antagonism and takes a stand on one side of it, voicing the universal truth of its political position.[2]

Notes

Thanks to Lee Quinby for her comments on an early draft of this chapter.

1. Portions of this and several following paragraphs come from Dean, Anderson, & Lovink (2006).
2. As Žižek writes, 'the *universal* truth of a concrete situation can be articulated only from a thoroughly *partisan* position; truth is, by definition, one-sided' (2002, p. 177).

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