

Representation and Contestation Cultural Politics in a Political Century

Series Editors

Dr Robert Fisher
Dr Daniel Riha

Edited by

Ching-Yu Lin and John McSweeney

Advisory Board

Dr Alejandro Cervantes-Carson	Dr Martin McGoldrick
Professor Margaret Chatterjee	Revd Stephen Morris
Dr Wayne Cristaudo	Professor John Parry
Dr Mira Crouch	Dr Paul Reynolds
Dr Phil Fitzsimmons	Professor Peter L. Twohig
Professor Asa Kasher	Professor S Ram Vemuri
Owen Kelly	Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson, O.B.E
Dr Peter Mario Kreuter	

Volume 73

A volume in the *Critical Issues* series
'Culture, Politics, Ethics'

Probing the Boundaries

Routledge

Amsterdam - New York, NY 2010

Table of Contents

Introduction <i>Ching-Yu Lin and John McSweeney</i>	vii
PART I: Representation, Media, Politics	
More Than Just a Laugh: Assessing The Politics of Camp in <i>The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert</i> <i>Ann-Marie Cook</i>	3
Actuality in the Internet-Mediated Political Public Sphere <i>Ejvind Hansen</i>	27
Ideology in Media Language: Hegemonic Discourse or Multiple Discourses? <i>Ewa Glapka</i>	47
PART II: Culture, Performance, Resistance	
Taiwanese Youth, Identity and Tai-Ke Culture: Resistance and the Performance of Identity <i>Ching-Yu Lin</i>	69
Enchantment and Disenchantment: Indigenous Australian Cultural Festivals and an Ethics of Uncertainty <i>Lisa Slater</i>	87
Accommodating Disadvantaged Cultural Minorities <i>Baldwin Wong</i>	109
The Paradox of Memory Studies: Studying a Praxis from Within <i>Fiona Schouten</i>	137
The Social Ethics of Modern Aesthetics <i>Pilar Damitão de Medeiros</i>	153

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of "ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence".

ISBN: 978-90-420-3149-4

E-Book ISBN: 978-90-420-3150-0

©Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam - New York, NY 2010

Printed in the Netherlands

- Rustin, E., 'The 'Glitter' Cycle', in *Australian Cinema in the 1990s*, I. Craven (ed). Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 133-148.
- Sontag, S., 'Notes on Camp', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Straus & Giroux, New York, 1964.
- Thompson, E.P., *The Making of the English Working Class*. Victor Gollancz, London, 1963.
- Vallence, D. and Zetlin, M., 'The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (review)'. *Cinema Papers*, vol. 101, October 1994, p. 62-3.
- Venkatasawmy, R. et al., 'From Sand to Bitumen, From Bushrangers to 'Bogans': Mapping the Australian Road Movie'. *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 70, 2001, p. 75-84.
- Verhoeven, D., 'The Sexual Terrain of the Australian Feature Film: Putting the Outback into the Ocker', in *The Bent Lens: A World Guide to Gay and Lesbian Films*, C. Jackson and P. Tapp (eds). Australian Catalogue Company, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 25-32.
- Willett, G., *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia*. Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 2000.
- Williams, E., 'Priscilla, Ginger and Fred'. *Quadrant*, June 1995, pp. 53-6.
- Williams, R., *Culture and Society*. Chatto & Windus, London, 1958.
- _____. *The Long Revolution*. Chatto & Windus, London, 1961.
- Willis, A., 'Cultural Studies and Popular Film,' in *Approaches to Popular Film*, J. Hollows and M. Jancovich (eds). Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, pp. 173-191.
- Ann-Marie Cook** is a Research Assistant at the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King's College London.

Actu(virtuality in the Internet-Mediated Political Public Sphere

Ejvind Hansen

Abstract

In this chapter I discuss the transformation of political discourse wrought by the rise of Internet-based communicative media. I argue that the conventional focus on the inter-activity that the Internet makes possible (through the availability of blogging sites, sites to display downloaded videos and pictures, commenting, virtual worlds, etc.) is misplaced, or at least in need of modification. I will take a Derridean turn in my analysis of the Internet effect to show that the medium carries a new structure of *act(virtuality)*, the import of which is to emancipate potentially the Internet user from the serial, coherent rationality that has dominated the major audio-visual media of modernity, thus opening a space for the virtual problematisation of political reality. This creates a new field, or game, in which political agents can engage. The problematising potential of the Internet is, however, counterbalanced by potentials for neutralization. Any radical strategy for change that would privilege the Internet must therefore, I will argue, be supplemented by more reflectively oriented approaches.

Key Words: Internet, public sphere, interactivity, world-disclosure, reflectivity.

1. Introduction

In this chapter I want to discuss how the rise of Internet-based communicative media has decisively changed the form and even the content of political discourse. In spite of the obvious inter-activating aspect of the Internet, I will argue that the Internet offers us, as well, various mechanisms that ultimately pacify the end user. Thus, instead of focusing on the Internet's interactive dimension and its political effects, I will emphasize another general change in the political public: the turn towards non-serial, experimental political expression. In order to articulate this, I will draw upon Derrida's notion of act(virtuality) - i.e. the idea that the virtual aspects of mediated relationships 'strike back' on reality.¹

The argument will run as follows: Section (2) takes up Habermas' analysis of the relationship between the bourgeois press and the development of a new kind of public sphere, in order to articulate the relationship between media and the political public sphere. I argue that the Internet introduces two features that may be said to be importantly new: (a) the lowering of the bar to entry and (b) the interactive capacity that can be easily built into Internet

sites. In section (3), I will problematise the notion of interactivity, and argue that the Internet's interactive dimension is counterbalanced by various pacifying features inhering in the user interface. I will thus turn, in (4), to the second new feature of digital media, the low bar entry, and argue that this feature presents us with the condition for the display of a more experimental attitude in discourses of all kinds, including political discourse. I will show that Derrida's notion of actvirltuality proves fruitful in articulating how the Internet's low bar to entry expands a political public sphere while at the same time detaching it from its commitment to serial, coherent rationalities. I will then, in (5), turn to a discussion of the implications for the political public sphere. I will argue that it leads not so much towards the articulation of political alternatives, but rather towards *problematizations* of the existing structures. In my final section, (6), I argue that the net effect of Internet-based media is to fashion a political public sphere that is more world-disclosing, and less reflective or argumentative in character. I will argue that this is not in itself a problem, if the argumentative and reflective approaches are not altogether repressed. The world-disclosing approach makes it possible for a more varied kind of participation in the political public sphere, and this is a good thing from the democratic perspective. But if this occurs without a reflective supplement, there is a risk that public political discussions will stagnate.

2. The Relationship between Media and the Public Sphere

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas published *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, in which he famously proposed that there was a symbiotic relationship between the development of a public sphere (in which political arguments are laid out in the open for public assessment) and the new mass-media (based on the printing technique) in the Early Modern era. Habermas' analysis has certainly been disputed,² but the terms of his analysis have nevertheless remained influential in establishing a close link between communicative media and the structures of the political public sphere.

Habermas argues that the emergence of the bourgeois class as a political entity is tightly connected to the emergence of printed newspapers at about the same time. His argument runs like this: The advent of newspapers, by making it possible for the people to see the legislative process and identify with this or that faction, created a constituency for politics within the bourgeoisie. In tandem with the new public interest in and ability to see the deliberative process, legislators were forced to articulate reasons for their positions in a form that could be accepted as reasonable by the public. This means that the legislative process had to be governed by rational criteria, at least insofar as rationality implies universal understanding.³

The emergence of newspapers thus introduces a new political factor, the public, and this in turn catalyses new political power-structures.

Historically, this favoured the consolidation of citizenship. Citizenship is a political status that offers the subject an identity that must be politically articulated through some identification with the legislative process in the state; it is a necessary condition of such an identification, according to Habermas, that the deliberative process be transparent, so that the citizens feel that their points of view are being respected, and rules of procedure are not being violated. Just as the newspapers are in favour of the notion of citizenship, so the textual construction and the distribution of newspapers, in turn, created a tie of dependence with a readership that formed itself self-consciously as 'public opinion,' or, in Habermasian terms, the emerging public sphere.⁴ This sphere was one that obeyed certain implicit rules and codes of responsibility, which provided the necessary condition for the development of citizenship.

The reach of the public sphere depends on the reach of the media that carries it. The process by which the citizen self identifies as such is, furthermore, dependent on the prevailing public sphere of a particular political entity. This means that the geographical extension of the national community is limited by the media as well. As long as this public sphere was mediated by newspapers that had to be distributed physically, the geographical reach of the public sphere was restricted. As more advanced technologies (the telegraph, electronic media, etc.) made news more quickly available within national boundaries, the public sphere could extend geographically, hereby furthering identification between citizens across local contexts. The emergence of the national state as an object of public identification is thus closely connected with the advent of new technologies.

The newspapers were generally commercial from the beginning. Together with their overall uni-directional character (readers could not respond immediately to reports),⁵ the dominant media structure nourished a passive public or audience of news consumers. Gradually this passivity infiltrated the character of the media, as it bowed to the public demand to be entertained by sensation rather than use the news as aids to reflection. The political processes became theatrical battles, where it was more important for a side to win than for the ideas represented by each side to be accorded a fair hearing. A critical public sphere evolved into a passive audience, manipulated by publicity and entertainment. The introduction of the first generations of electronic mass-media does not change this setting fundamentally, since the analogue electronic mass-media (mainly radio and television) is uni-directional and commercial as well. So even if the managers and producers of dominant media had wanted to engage critically with the public, they would have confronted large structural problems in trying to realize any such project.

The question is, however, whether and how this setting is changed when the unidirectional flow is changed, as it is with the introduction of the

digital mass-media such as the Internet.⁶ The Internet amplifies the transgeographical feature of traditional mass-media. There is, however, at least two other respects in which digital media are generally said to differ decisively from traditional mass-media: the low bar to entry that makes participation as a content producer (whether commercial or non-commercial) on a global scale relatively easy; and the interactivity inherent in the medium.⁷ Internet based media are on a technological level bi-directional. That means that there necessarily is a bi-directional exchange of information in these media.

Still, this does not automatically imply that interactivity of a political kind will have any kind of impact on the public sphere, or will wrest control of the political discourse from those who have had control of it. In the following section, I will problematise conventional appraisal of digital interactivity as necessarily dissolving the older forms of passive information consumption. Some of the interactivating features of digital technology are unquestionable. However, as I will show, they are easily counterbalanced by certain pacifying features of the end producer/user situation. Both interactivity and passivity may be said to spring from the low-entry features of the technology.

3. Interactivity in Internet based Media?

The notion of interactivity has often been emphasized in discussions of what is fundamentally new in digital mass media. Users of analogue mass media (such as the analogue versions of radio and television) are, it is said, subjected to a uni-directional communicative relationship, which, in essence, merely gives them a choice among channels. The users of analogue mass media are reduced to recipients with very little possibility for real-time active engagement in the information flow they perceive. Most often the possibility for such engagement is reduced to channel changing, turning off the media or, if the perceived event invites the audience to do so, using the telephone in order to participate in a call-in show. The latter case, however, only allows a limited part of the audience to get through to actual participation; and the participation is only made possible through the use of another medium that has interactive capabilities.

It is obvious that, technically, interactive capacity has increased on the Internet. This is not to say that *every* Internet based communication presents interactive potential - certain websites are for example created with no options for feedback - but there has been a significant increase in using the media to create interactive communities. One important reason for this is probably to be found in the character of the distributive nets that connect Internet-based media. The Internet is based upon an informational notation-form in which information is stripped from semantic content. This causes some problems in determining whether the received information corresponds

with the dispatched information.⁸ As a consequence of this, digital information is often distributed in protocols through which such evaluation is possible, but in order for the evaluation to be possible, it is necessary that the addressee returns certain information about the received information, thus setting up a circuit between received digital information and returned information.

Thus, the architecture of digital media is mainly bi-directional.⁹ Interactivity is not possible through the analogue television set, because there is no informational flow from the user back to the broadcaster.

Bi-directionality is, however, only *one* condition of interactivity, and is certainly not in itself *identical* with the kind of interactivity that is politically relevant. Bi-directionality can be limited to a mere mechanical feedback, whereas interactivity (in relation to the democratic political public sphere) needs an aspect of conscious agency. Interactivity is mainly desirable because it devolves the power of expression upon the users.

There are at least three ways in which interactivity can be limited (in spite of the bi-directionality of the media): (1) it can simply remain deactivated or hidden. While two-way informational flow is built into digital media, bi-directional features can easily be hidden from the users interface. This is for example the case with many websites: Even though the reading or watching of such sites is technically supported by a mechanical bi-directional exchange, the software does not allow for the user's active engagement through a user interface.

More importantly for our argument, (2), in cases where the user is actually allowed to engage in a feedback-process, the available alternatives for feedback may sometimes be so restricted that it does not count as genuine interactivity. For example, web polling can be so arranged that the range of options open to visitors is extremely narrow. An opinion poll on fiscal policy, for instance, could contain the following alternatives for the participants:

- (1) Tax rates should be lowered with 5 percentage points.
- (2) Tax rates should be lowered with 10 percentage points.

This example should make it obvious that interactivity is, in these cases, more of a lure than a reality. Visitors are forced to accent the range of suggested alternatives, but are not engaged in either building the alternatives or allowed to protest against the alternatives given. If the visitor is against tax reduction, or thinks that they should be more radical, she is prevented in expressing her opinion. Thus, a site can design a limited degree of interactivity.¹⁰

Finally (3), even in cases where the media are designed for some range of user engagement alternatives,, the interactivating features can be

designed so as to keep the users in the passive position. I will elaborate on this point below.

Before doing this, it is, however, important to emphasize that I am not concerned, here, to diminish the extent or quality of Internet-based politically relevant interactivity. As has been well publicized, many political events have been mediated by and hosted on the Internet.¹¹ For instance: (i) E-mail lists have constituted an inevitable cornerstone for social demonstrations such as the Seattle-and ATTAC-movements; (ii) many political websites are hosted on the Internet, and these often pick up and accumulate political grievances from all around the world that would otherwise have been too fragmentary to acquire influence; (iii) blogs have become an important component of the public sphere in a relatively brief time. This has introduced a whole new trajectory for political media figures. Since many blogs contain comments threads, this has also introduced a new dimension to the back and forth between the blog writer and the audience;¹² and finally, (iv) recent efforts of the Chinese establishment to control the results of Google-searches demonstrate that the Internet is seen as a powerful source for political activity, the effects of which the political establishment may seek to control.

Besides the system architecture mentioned above (the bi-directional character of the distributive net), the interactive landscape of the Internet comes with several interlocking features:

(a) Searchability and appropriability: The huge amount of information that is available on the Internet makes it possible for those who have the skills to track down, link to, appropriate and send information.

(b) Border-crossing: the trespassing of physical borders is important. People across national borders and from some of the most isolated areas of the globe have access to each other, which makes it possible that people with common interests can (virtually) meet, and hereby create powerful constituencies.¹³

(c) Financial and physical access: As a mass-communicating media, the Internet is comparatively inexpensive. This is not to say that everybody can afford access to the Internet on a regular basis; neither that everybody can afford the educational skills that it takes to be able to navigate on the Internet. But compared to what it would take to reach a broad public with analogue media, the expenses of using the Internet are minimal.

(d) Privacy and Anonymity: Users of the Internet have available sophisticated ways to shield their identity if they so chose, or to erase physical traces of themselves in the use of the Internet. The initial anonymous starting point of the user allows users the freedom to invent themselves in various ways (physical constitution, temperament, social status, nationality, etc.). They can even invent several characters that act seemingly independent of each other.¹⁴ And finally,

(e) Virtuality:¹⁵ as a consequence of the previous points, communication through the Internet is very open to various experiments in fantasy-worlds. The users can thus invent virtual relations, situations and environments and see what happens in these new worlds.

Taken together, these features entail a loosening of traditional commitments. The users can create their own rules for communication, they can step in and out as they wish, and if the projects fail, the projects are most often simply taken down - without further costs-at least on an economic and technical level.

This clearly demonstrates the extent to which the Internet can support interactive features. In reality, however, the picture is less clear from the standpoint of the end-user/producer, as briefly stated above. Even in cases where the media are designed for interactivity, the interactivating features can be designed so as to keep the users in the passive position. Three limits come to mind:

(i) Obstacles and offensive behaviour. Just as it is easy to construct virtual worlds through the Internet that express the positive projects of the participants, it is easy to construct obstacles to virtual realization or to engage in more destructive approaches that push the user back to the passive position.¹⁶ By allowing users to enjoy anonymity and protecting their privacy in a virtual environment, a space opens that allows for the creation of un congenial characters who may obstruct communicative exchanges by writing aggressive, destructive, off-topic contributions, or in other ways create an atmosphere of menace. Such behaviour can lead to the collective collapse of trust that participation in the activities will have any significant consequences.

(ii) Information overload. The sheer quantity of information available on the Internet may in itself overwhelm users, paralysing them into inactivity. Either because the agent feels urged to look up *all* relevant information (which is an overwhelming task given the extensive load of information on the Internet); or because the agent feels that everything relevant has already been said on the Internet.

(iii) Designing passivity. As our tax policy example demonstrates, narrow inter-active design, as for instance the creation of restricted alternatives, or the putting up of a technical interface that is oblique and urges certain specific choices upon participants, or prevents certain groups from participating at all, allows the direction and scale of interactivity to be countervailed from within.

So, just as the Internet has interactive features, it also makes sense to say that it has various ways of imposing end user passivity. Internet based media thus *displace* the relationship between activity and passivity - rather than merely furthering political activity. Just as it has the capacity to engage the end user in an activity, it also has the potential of putting the end user

back in a pacifying situation. I will therefore in the following suggest an alternative approach to what is significantly new in the Internet-mediated political public sphere. This will serve as a means to articulate at least one of the sources of the displacement of the political public sphere.

4. The Actuvirtuality of Internet Based Exchanges

The importance of media in cultural exchanges was a concern of the late Derrida. Even though he never contemplated the Internet systematically,¹⁷ I think that his occasional reflections can be used as a fruitful point of departure for an analysis of the impact of the Internet in the political public sphere.

In *Échographies de la télévision* (1996), Derrida and B. Stiegler discuss the impact of the electronic mass media on the cultural landscape. The discussion primarily focuses on analogue media (radio and television). According to Derrida, these technologies displace the sphere of the political:

If we recall [...] that access to writing in the classical sense was the condition of citizenship, this is the very thing that is changing today. The question of democracy, such as it has been presenting itself to us here, may no longer be tied to that of citizenship - at least if politics is defined by citizenship, and if citizenship is defined, as up to now it has been, by inscription in a place, within a territory or within a nation whose body is rooted in a privileged territory.¹⁸

Derrida thus suggests that the notion of citizenship is under challenge due to factors that have been discussed in section (2): The connection between the citizen, the geographical or territorial placement and the nation is challenged by the character of the media. In the quote, it is clear that his reason for this statement is primarily to be found in the global character of the media. Derrida also thinks that interactivity is important, but he warns that the notion of interactivity is often used in a naive way.¹⁹ The point is that media as such never opens a space for a symmetric communicative relationship. As seen in the previous section, nothing about the architecture of the Internet or the range of website user experiences refutes that point. Instead of analysing degrees of interactivity, Derrida thus suggests that the unfolding technology be analysed in terms of what kinds of *arte-factuality* and *actu-virtuality* are coming into being.

The notions of *artifactuality* and *actuvirtuality* point us towards the ways in which facts are presented in the media. On the one hand, the notion of *artifactuality* designates the point that the reality of the media is essentially artificial. Derrida mentions the 'speaker' in the news, who apparently addresses (speaks to) the viewers, but actually (s)he merely reads a text on a

teleprompter. This is part of the communicative setup. The viewers know that it would not make sense to respond to the propositions of the speaker. The speaker does not 'really' address the individual viewer - the appearance of this addressing is artificial ('actuality' comes to us by way of a fictional fashioning').²⁰

On the other hand, the notion of *actuvirtuality* (which will be the focus of this chapter) designates the point that the virtual character of the mediated relationship 'strikes back' on reality. Every media carries a certain temporal and spatial structure for communicative exchanges.

To take an example, traditional television typically embodies a unidirectional exchange between spatially distant agents; through video-recordings it is possible to perceive the distributed content at other times than it was performed, but there is nevertheless mostly a clear sequence in which it should be perceived in order to be accessible. This is the virtual *rhythm* inherent in television.²¹ The representation of the media is decisively shaped by a virtual temporality and spatiality, and this carries with it a virtual structure of the mediated events.

This virtuality 'makes its mark even on the structure of the produced event.'²² The virtuality of the media does not remain merely virtual - the reality that is presented through the media carries this rhythm. The narratives that can be distributed through television have to respect the rhythm of television. They can represent realities from spatially distant regions, whereby it becomes possible to identify with spatially distant events - i.e. it becomes possible to form a public across immediately experiential communities. Television furthermore can present events that shuffle through various temporal settings, but nevertheless they need to demonstrate serially structured narratives.²³

Returning to the notion of the political public sphere, this means that the public sphere that has grown up around the virtuality that is carried in certain media (newspapers, radio, television - and now: the Internet) is shaped by a certain rhythmic structure. Which presents us with the problem: what is the telic and rhythmic structure of the Internet-borne political public sphere? In the following section, I argue that there is a feedback between the less serial structure of presented ends and the lack of responsibility and commitment which is a distinct feature of the Internet. This means that the binding to rational systematicity becomes less urgent - for the benefit for a more experimental attitude. The virtuality that is carried by the Internet media is thus furthering a more experimental attitude.

5. A Field of Experiments

This can be seen by returning to the low bare to entry to content production on the Internet. It is possible, as we have mentioned, to navigate and act on the Internet without heavy economic or personal costs. This

feature is furthered by the inexpensive access to a transnational and -cultural border-crossing network; and the assurance of personal anonymity (at least in relation to those with whom you communicate). This means that you can join and leave communities as you like. There are certainly limitations to this that spring from what one as an embodied person with a certain psychological constitution can handle. The point is, however, that the low bar to entry also entails that you do not actually have to invest your personal integrity in the social relations on the Internet. The physical reductions in Internet-based communication thus open a virtual space for experiments with some aspects of your personality.²⁴ You can hide behind virtual characters (e.g. avatars) that only exist on the Internet.²⁵ It is certainly possible to engage in communities with heavy personal commitment, but you can choose not to. This means that the investment of the Internet user in her personal component of the lifeworld is (comparatively) detached from the urge of coherence, credibility, and veraciousness.²⁶ This means that you in one community can have certain views, qualities, temperaments that differ significantly from your profile in other communities. It is not required that your profile presents a coherent unity, in which you are responsible for your previous claims and actions. You can attribute with certain claims and actions at one time that are not directly related to previous and future claims and actions. Your claims and actions can thus present a *net* of varying rationalities and opinions (mutually interacting) - without losing your personal credibility.²⁷

This feature of the Internet is supplemented with a less serial structure. Most analogue media are based on a clear sequential structure. This means that there is a clear starting and ending of the presented narrative. This sequentiality is challenged in the media by the hypertextual structure. As the 'author' of Internet-based content you will naturally link to other contents (to a higher degree than in analogue media). This means that you are not able to predict the exact succession in which the hypertext is read. This opens for alternative (hypertextual) kinds of coherence in relation to serial media.

This freedom from traditional serial accounts of coherence is an important source for the virtuality of the Internet. You can experiment with your personality. You can also experiment with how your personality interacts with other persons, whereby the social relationships as such become a target of collaborative experimentation. You can furthermore setup virtual worlds in which the virtual characters and relationships interact.²⁸ And so on. The actuivirtual structure of the Internet thus furthers an experimental attitude where the quest for linear, coherent rationality is less pertinent. On a legal level the exchanges are certainly just as committing as exchanges outside the Internet,²⁹ but the disentanglement of the agents from physical constraints opens communication on the Internet to a greater degree of experimentation. Insofar as the political public sphere is embodied on the Internet, the

actuivirtuality of the Internet will affect the actual shapes of the political public sphere.

Now, experiments may certainly have very different characters and ends ranging from entertainment to art to politics. It is the latter which is our concern in the following. In order to articulate my points, I will turn to a stereotype in the political field: the insurgents, i.e. those who want social transformation - and using this figure to understand just how actuivirtuality enmeshes with politics on the Net.³⁰

The virtualized temporality of the Internet definitely has some transformative potential - at least on a rational level. The relative independence from fixed, coherent rationalities makes it easy to create alternative scenarios in cyberspace that draw a sharp contrast to the conventions of entrenched power. Such scenarios are, at the outset, not committed to specific truth-claims. One can think of them as Foucaultian counter-narratives that are on the one hand motivated by a new awareness of aspects that are not accounted for in traditional narratives; but on the other hand do not claim to articulate a narrative that can exhaustively account for the real political realities:

The critical ontology of our selves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [...] These inquiries [...] have their theoretical coherence in the definition of the historically unique forms in which the generalities of our relations to things, to others, to ourselves, have been problematised.³¹

Thus, the articulation of a virtual scenario with a transformative intent on the Internet does not necessarily insist on specific truth-claims in a traditional sense, but is rather put forward to *problematis*e existing truth-claims. In order for counter-narratives to have problematising effects it is not necessary that they articulate some counter truth claim in a strict sense. It suffice that they have not been determined to be derived from false or incoherent assumptions in a strict sense. Counter-narratives can have problematising effects because they can point out aspects that are not taken into account by traditional narratives. Virtual realities are thus at the outset mainly problematising on a rational level. In order to have problematising effects on the political public spheres, it is necessary to have such problematisations related to reality:

[I]f we are not to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of freedom, it seems to me that this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one. I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.³²

It is a somewhat trivial point that thought-experiments produce problematising effects only if they take reality seriously. I do, however, think it should be understood in a less trivial manner. The test of reality is not to contemplate how close the thought experiments are to a fixed notion of reality. The point is rather that the critic will test *reality* against a given *virtual* reality ('to determine the precise form the change will take'). Sometimes the experiment is too trivial or too radical. In such cases, the test of reality will produce nothing. In other cases, however, there will be a fruitful degree of tension between the experimental scenarios and reality, and in such cases the virtual world will be able to induce significant changes in the actual political public spheres. An example of a case where the tension had a fruitful degree can be found in the *Global Justice Movements* that evolved through Internet based networks in the aftermath of (among other events) N. Kleins *No Logo*. *No Logo* as a book is not in itself connected to the Internet, but the narrative that is contained in it only gained ongoing critical influence because of the possibility of letting the narrative evolve freely within Internet based networks. The movement was mediated through the Internet, leaving open room for cooperation in spite of cultural and social disagreements. Given that immediate consensus was not urgent, there was more room for thought-experiments and creation of counternarratives across cultural differences.³³

The detachment from fixed, coherent meta-narratives thus is an important corollary to problematising existing narratives. At the same time, however, these alternative narratives are certainly themselves easily problematised by new counter-narratives. As such, the actuvirtual character of the Internet can end up serving to pacify the end user - i.e. it is easy for counter-insurgents to setup obstructing narratives that prevent change. The virtual and experimental character of the Internet based networks opens to obstructing interferences that have a destructive impact on the aspirations for creative narratives.

6. Experiments and Reflections

The relative emancipation from serial, coherent, argumentative rationalities thus entails that the political public sphere tends to allow more

experimental approaches to communicating narratives, arguments, or framing debates when mediated through the Internet. As we have noted, this may carry the seed of potential progressive action, but it is always vulnerable to its own tools. The Internet mediated political public sphere thus still faces certain challenges in becoming a critical, democratically mobilized counterpart to the political establishment.

It is relevant, here, to relate the above analyses to the discussion of the relationship between the world-disclosing and reflective argumentative critique that took place in the aftermath of Habermas' *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (1985).³⁴ It is no coincidence that I have used two philosophers from the world-disclosing tradition (Derrida and Foucault) in order to articulate my analysis of the Internet-mediated political public sphere. The world-disclosing approach to critique is characterized by mainly focussing on whether new and potentially relevant aspects of the world are being revealed, whereas the reflective argumentative approach is characterized by argumentative self-investigations, contemplating the reasonability of certain views inside a given rational horizon.

It makes sense to claim that the political public sphere on the Internet pushes the political debates in a world-disclosing direction.³⁵ The political public sphere that is found on the Internet is, as demonstrated above, less tied to a specific and continuous argumentative investigation; the actuvirtual structure of the Internet rather promotes an experimental attitude that seeks to problematise prevailing outlooks.

In *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* Habermas is very cautious about the value of the world-disclosing approach:

To the degree that the poetic, world-disclosing function of language gains primacy and structuring force, language escapes the structural constraints and communicative functions of everyday life [...] that makes possible a use of language oriented toward mutual understanding - and hence make possible a coordination of plans of action that operates via the intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims.³⁶

Habermas is rather suspicious about approaches that seek to introduce separate discourses, because this will make it possible to instantiate irrational communities that are immunized against critique.

I am not as sceptical as Habermas as to the possible progressive gains of world-disclosing critique (at least as it happens on the Internet). The alternative worlds that are set up on the Internet are indeed (in abstraction) to some extent immunized against critique (if you do not like what you see in a community, you may only be left with the choice to leave it, depending on

the tools available to you to alter it). This is, however, only insofar as they remain purely virtual. As soon as a virtual experiment starts to become embodied in real life situations, as has been the case with the Global Justice Movement, it becomes as criticisable as any political experiment.

The main problem with Internet embedded world-disclosures is their vulnerability to neutralization. This means that they rarely gain real political influence. The emancipation from tight rational commitments opens a space for experiments - but this emancipation also makes it easy to *obstruct* these experiments.

It would thus not be desirable if the political public world was occupied altogether by the world-disclosing approach. On the one hand, world-disclosing approaches are not very good at making *decisions*. Secondly, it is important that the world-disclosing experiments are subjected to meta-reflections, in order to help the participants pre-empt and fend off the more destructive approaches to the actualizing practices on the Internet. Reflective approaches do, however, need to be challenged in order to remain creative. And this is where the actvurtuality of the Internet may show its most fruitful impact on a contemporary political public.

Notes

¹ In relation to Ewa Glapka's chapter one could say, that rather than focussing on how media reproduce ideological content, I will claim that media furthermore *produce* certain structures in our cultural interaction that can further and/or hinder certain kinds of ideology - and sometimes the structures of media actually *prevent* ideologies from becoming hegemonic.

² See for example HK Nielsen, 'Digitale Medier og Offentlighed', in *Digitale mellemværender*, E Hansen, D Kreutzfeldt & I Sylvestersen (eds), Philosophia, Århus, 2008, pp. 86-107.

³ J Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 129.

⁴ J Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, p. 221; J Habermas, 'Der europäische Nationalstaat - Zu Vergangenheit und Zukunft von Souveränität und Staatsbürgerschaft', in J Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, pp. 128-153.

⁵ Features and letters to the editor are exceptions from the uni-directionality of newspapers. The extension of these contributions in relation to amount of readers is, however, so minimal that I will leave this out of account.

⁶ For a similar approach to this question, see Y Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yale University Press, New Haven Conn., 2006.

⁷ E.g. in J Slevin, *The Internet and Society*, Polity Press, Malden, MA, 2000; JL Zittrain, 'The Generative Internet', *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 119, 2006, pp. 1974-2040; J Zittrain, *The Future of the Internet: And How to Stop It*, Yale University Press, New Haven Conn., 2008.

⁸ For an extended analysis of these problematics, see NO Finnemann, *Thought, Sign and Machine - The Idea of the Computer Reconsidered*, 15 February 1999, viewed 15 November 2009, <<http://www.au.dk/ckultur/fpages/publications/nof/tsm/abstract.html> Aarhus, 1999>.

⁹ Some protocols are actually not bi-directional (e.g. the UDP-protocol), because in some communications the application protocols are able to handle certain degrees of inaccuracy. In such communications there is no interactivity either. The *main* setting of the Internet is, however, based upon bi-directional protocols.

¹⁰ Notice that my point with this example is not to claim that web-mediated communication does not include interactivity. My point is rather that architectural affordances only give interactive potential to web-site design, which the designer can choose or not choose to implement. Interactivity is thus not necessarily very marked on web-sites - despite their bi-directional constitution.

¹¹ A survey of some of these can be found in AM McCaughey & MD Ayers, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York & London, 2003.

¹² Blogs have in this way gained a very influential status in for example Iran. See ML Bertelsen, U Dubgaard, U Koch, J Michelsen & JG Rasmussen, 'Det sidste åndehul? - en undersøgelse af blogging som redskab til systemkritik i Iran', *Internationale Udviklingsstudier*, RUC, 2006. See also D Gillmor, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, January 2006.

¹³ J Bohman, 'Expanding Dialogue: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Prospects for Transnational Democracy', in *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, N Crossley & JM Roberts (eds), Blackwell Publ. Ltd, Oxford, 2004, pp. 131-155.

¹⁴ For an extended reflection of the virtual characters of users on the Internet, see MV Madsen, 'Mig og min avatar - Internettet som identitetslaboratorium', in *Digitale mellemværender*, E Hansen, D Kreutzfeldt & I Sylvestersen (eds), Philosophia, Århus, 2008, pp. 178-198. Notice, that to some effect, this feature twists Habermas emphasis on visibility as a constituent feature for publicity (J Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen*

Gesellschaft, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 57). The publicity on the Internet is certainly visible, but not necessarily as the product of unified, coherent agents. Agents can experiment with their identities. This will become decisive below.

¹⁵ I use the notion of 'virtuality' to articulate the feature of media to present alternative realities - i.e. realities that are not actually real (in a material sense), but still display similarities with the real (you can, for example, see your wife on your Skype-client, without her actually being present). Mediated presentations of objects are always *reduced* presentations, and the reductions open a room for experiments. The virtuality of the Internet opens the possibility to 'play' with certain aspects of real-life reality, because the Internet-based presentation is freed from (for example) the materiality of the object. The material reduction thus makes it possible to situate your virtual wife on the moon.

¹⁶ This is a point expressed by, among others, L. Lessig in L. Lessig, *Code: Version 2.0*, Basic Books, New York, 2006, pp. 105-6.

¹⁷ In 1997 he did participate in an interview about the disengagement of the paper-based media. See J. Derrida, 'Le papier ou moi, vous savez...(nouvelles spéculations sur un luxe des pauvres)'. *Cahiers de médilogie*, vol. 1997, no. 4, 1997, pp. 33-57. He acknowledged that digital media might lead to a disengagement from paper in the media. In 1997 the actual shape of this disengagement was, however, not yet visible - and Derrida refrained from a detailed analysis of the digital media.

¹⁸ J. Derrida & B. Stiegler, *Échographies de la Télévision: Entretiens Filmés*, Galilée, Paris, 1996, pp. 67-8. The English translation (slightly modified) is taken from J. Derrida & B. Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, J. Bajorek (trans), Polity, Cambridge, August 2002, pp. 56-7. The English translation is referred to as ET in the notes that follow.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69 [ET: p. 58].

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11-2 [ET: p. 3].

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15 [ET: p. 7].

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14 [ET: p. 6].

²³ I.e. the narratives can themselves shuffle between temporal settings, but the narrative would (normally) fail, if we were to 'tell the story' starting from behind.

²⁴ Another source is certainly the semantic openness of the protocols (AR Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

²⁵ MV Madsen, 'Mig og min avatar - Internettet som identitetslaboratorium', in *Digitale mellemværender*, E. Hansen, D. Krutzfeldt & I. Sylvestersen (eds), Philosophia, Århus, 2008, pp. 178-198.

²⁶ J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 2, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1981, pp. 209-13; J. Habermas, 'Handlungen, Sprechakte, sprachlich vermittelte Interaktionen und Lebenswelt', in J. Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 96-7.

²⁷ As demonstrated in Ann-Marie Cook's chapter, analogue media like film are able to experiment with characters in a very subtle manner too. The main difference is, however, that these experiments have to happen behind the face of an actor/actress - and the actor/actress is *not* personally identified with the character. So, if we met Hugo Weaving on the street, we would not expect him to be like Anthony 'Tick' Belrose/Mitzi Del Bra.

²⁸ Famous examples are Second Life, Habbo, GoogleLively, and Nicktropolis. Diane Saco has articulated this point as the possibility of multiplying our notions of public spaces: D. Saco, *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

²⁹ This is so even though the geographic distance and the relative anonymity makes it difficult to enforce these laws.

³⁰ Notice that it is *not* my claim that the experimental character of the Internet only and mainly furthers political change. The experimental character of the Internet might just as well further the political establishment (an example of this is found in Barack Obama's United States presidential campaign in 2008) or the political reactionaries.

³¹ M. Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?', in *Dits Écrits*, vol. 4, D. Defert, F. Ewald & J. Lagrange (eds), Gallimard, Paris, 1984, pp. 1396-7. The English translation is taken from *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow (ed), New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 50.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 1393 [ET: p. 46].

³³ DDPD Porta, M. Andretta, L. Mosea & HR Reiter, *Globalization From Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks*, University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 2006.

³⁴ This discussion is well documented in N. Kompridis, 'Schwerpunkt: Welterschliessung und Kritik'. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1993, pp. 487-574.

³⁵ This is the point where I depart from Benkler most decisively, since Benkler insists that the Internet emphasizes a self-reflective attitude (e.g. in Y. Benkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 15, 297, 473).

³⁶ J. Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 240. The English translation is taken from J. Habermas, *The philosophical discourse of modernity: Twelve Lectures*, FG Lawrence (trans), Polity, Cambridge, 1987, p. 204.

Bibliography

- Benkler, Y., *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2006.
- Bertelsen, M.L., U. Dubgaard, U. Koch, J. Michelsen & J.G. Rasmussen, 'Det sidste åndehul? - en undersøgelse af blogging som redskab til systemkritik i Iran'. *Internationale Udviklingsstudier*, RUC, 2006.
- Bohman, J., 'Expanding Dialogue: The Internet, The Public Sphere and Prospects for Transnational Democracy' in *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*. N Crossley & JM Roberts (eds), Blackwell Publ. Ltd, Oxford, 2004, pp. 131-155.
- Derrida, J., 'Le Papier ou moi, Vous Savez...(Nouvelles Spéculations sur un Luxe des Pauvres)'. *Cahiers de médiologie*, no. 4, 1997, pp. 33-57.
- Derrida, J. & B. Stiegler, *Échographies De La Télévision: Entretiens Filmés*. Galilée, Paris, 1996.
- _____. *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. Polity, Cambridge, August 2002.
- Finnemann, N.O., *Thought, Sign and Machine: The Idea of the Computer Reconsidered*. 15 February 1999, viewed 15 November 2009, <<http://www.au.dk/ckultur/pages/publications/nof/sm/abstract.html>> Aarhus, 1999.
- Foucault, M., 'Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?' in D. Defert, F. Ewald & J. Lagrange (eds), vol. IV, Gallimard, Paris, 1984, pp. 562-578.
- Foucault, M. & P. Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*. Pantheon Books, New York, 1984.
- Galloway, A.R., *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004.
- Gillmor, D., *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, January 2006.
- Habermas, J., *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1981.
- _____. *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: zwölf Vorlesungen*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1985.

- _____. 'Handlungen, Sprechakte, sprachlich vermittelte Interaktionen und Lebenswelt' in J Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 63-104.
- _____. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1990.
- _____. *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1992.
- _____. 'Der europäische Nationalstaat - Zu Vergangenheit und Zukunft von Souveränität und Staatsbürgerschaft' in J Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, pp. 128-153.
- Habermas, J. & F.G. Lawrence, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Polity, Cambridge, 1987.
- Klein, N., *No logo: Taking Aim at The Brand Bullies*. Picador, New York, 1999.
- Konpridis, N., 'Schwerpunkt: Welterschliessung und Kritik'. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1993, pp. 487-574.
- _____. *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2006.
- Lessig, L., *Code: Version 2.0*. Basic Books, New York, N.Y., 2006.
- Madsen, M.V., 'Mig og min avatar - Internettet som identitetslaboratorium' in E. Hansen, D. Kreutzfeldt & I. Sylvestersen (eds), *Digitale mellemværender*. Philosophia, Århus, 2008, pp. 178-198.
- McCaughy, A.M. & Ayers M.D., *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*. Routledge, New York & London, 2003.
- Nielsen, H.K., 'Digitale medier og offentlighed' in E Hansen, D Kreutzfeldt & I Sylvestersen (eds), *Digitale mellemværender*, Philosophia, Århus, 2008, pp. 86-107.

Porta, D.D.P.D., Andretta M., Mosca L. & Reiter H.R., *Globalizing From Below: Transnational Activists And Protest Networks*. University Of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, May 2006.

Saco, D., *Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

Shirky, C., *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Press HC, The, London, February 2008.

Slevin, J., *The Internet and Society*. Polity Press, Malden, MA, 2000.

Zittrain, J.L., 'The Generative Internet'. *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 119, 2006, pp. 1974-2040.

_____. *The Future of the Internet: And How to Stop It*. Yale University Press, New Haven Conn., 2008.

Ejvind Hansen is Research Director at The Danish School of Media and Journalism. He is doing research on the significance of digital media in the structures of culture.

Ideology in Media Language: Hegemonic Discourse or Multiple Discourses?

Ewa Glapka

Abstract

Media, as the chief site of meaning production, reproduce ideologies. I propose that the investigation of the ideological reproduction requires the examination of both media texts production and the texts reception. In the study I demonstrate that the media-based perpetuation of ideologies as well as recipients' compliance with and rejection of them can be traced along the patterns of language used by the media producers and the media recipients. The expansion of material culture used to be considered responsible for turning contemporary consumers into a passive mass incapable of developing a critical relation to the commodities offered. In later models within culture studies, the consumers are conceptualised as self-aware 'cultural experts' selectively constructing their identities through consumption. Following this new account of consumption, mass media recipients should be expected to show resistance to the ideological underpinnings of mass media discourse. The results of the study presented in the current paper indicate, however, that subject positions available for the media recipients deprive them of the actual possibilities of contending the media's 'hidden agenda'. In the study, participants were asked to read an advertising text selected for its ideological gender bias identified by means of Critical Discourse Analysis toolkit. The same methodology was employed in the subsequent analysis of language elicited from the participants. The results show how ideology articulated in the public discourse of the media is reiterated in the vernacular discourses of their recipients. The conclusions garnered provide a point in favor of a more interdisciplinary approach to social studies, with the present investigation serving as an example of how culture studies may be informed by Critical Discourse Analysis.

Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, gender, ideology, media, subjectivity.

1. Media, Language, Ideology

There are numerous ways of conceptualizing ideology. The notion endorsed here is one of ideology as a practice of meaning production and interpretation.¹ One of the chief sites of meaning production and interpretation is the media, reproductive of numerous ideologies. Emphatically, I propose that the investigation of how media-based meaning