

MODINET
Center for Media and Democracy in the Network Society

MODINET is a research project with the purpose of developing an innovative interdisciplinary research agenda investigating the effects of globalization and the new media culture in politics and democracy as well as the effects on the traditional media institutions and everyday life in the information and network society.

The MODINET project is funded by the Danish Research Agency. Activities formally commenced in September 2002 and will conclude by September 2005

Theme issue

**Media Convergence, Mediated Communication, and the Transformation of
the Public Sphere**

Selection of papers presented at the MODINET conference October 21st -23rd
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©John Durham Peters, Roger Silverstone, Peter Dahlgren,
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Working paper no. 8, 2004
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Print: Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Reprocenter
University of Copenhagen

ISBN 87-91394-07-4

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Preface

**Klaus Bruhn Jensen,
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Jürgen Habermas' 1962 volume on the public sphere, which set an important agenda for several decades of media research as well as of political science, already referred to the *transformation* of the public sphere - *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. While describing the historical emergence of a social space for collective reflexivity, the volume also suggested the tendential closing of this space once again between the twin pressures of market and state, or at least a compromising of its potential for political communication and democratic participation. Many subsequent studies have elaborated, qualified, or questioned this suggestion in theoretical as well as empirical terms. As a research agenda, however, the public sphere has remained a generative concept at the center of interdisciplinary research on media and democracy.

Another round of studies on the fate and future of the public sphere has been stimulated by the coming of the internet and, more generally, by the degree of convergence of contemporary media into a more integrated media environment. On the one hand, new media forms and more media outlets might facilitate greater participation by both individual citizens and social movements in the political process at large. On the other hand, integration in itself may entail concentration and, hence, less diversity of the available information and the accessible communication. This publication brings together some of the papers from the second annual conference of the MODINET project, addressing this family of issues. Between them, the papers explore several new conditions and practices of political communication, reconsidering, as well classic dilemmas of the public sphere.

In the opening paper, John Durham Peters reminds us that conversation, while key to much thinking about political communication on a society-wide scale, is not the only conceivable model and that, indeed, conversational ideals may in fact blind us to relevant alternatives or supplements. Next, Roger Silverstone considers the specific conditions of communication in a multicultural setting, introducing the concept of counterpoint from the field of music to explore a category of contrapuntal cultures. And, Peter Dahlgren

identifies three dimensions of the public sphere, and addresses their further implications for the diverse civic cultures that the contemporary public sphere includes.

The following three papers examine particular media or cases for their implications concerning a changing public sphere. Departing from a critical reading of Manuel Castells' approach to social movements, Henrik Bødker turns to the much-publicized file-sharing systems within music, and asks to what extent such 'piracy' may qualify as a social movement. Henrik Søndergaard revisits the difficulties of public service broadcasting in a digital context and notes, among other things, some of the distinctive formats of broadcasting through which public service may retain its position in the media environment. Finally, Lars Torpe assesses the potential of the internet for political communication with reference to local Danish communities, offering a helpful distinction between, on the one hand, e-democracy in the sense of public participation in, and input to, policy making and, on the other hand, e-government in the sense of output from public authorities and their contact with citizens and other stakeholders. Like other papers in this collection, Torpe's paper serves as a reminder regarding the gaps between potential and practice in the network society, and regarding the role of research in at least identifying and clarifying such gaps.

Conversation, Democracy and Communication Technology

John Durham Peters, University of Iowa, USA

The Hegemony of Conversation

It is an instructive fact that all of the political positions represented in contemporary cultural theory and media studies agree on the value of "conversation." The Marxist tradition calls for authentic modes of interaction, from Adorno's complaint that the one-way communication of the culture industry resembles the Führer in its ubiquitous, inescapable commands, or the dream, shared by Brecht and Raymond Williams among many others, of using the mass media as means of interactive, public communication. Leading sociologists such as Bourdieu, Giddens, and Habermas all favor versions of what Giddens calls dialogical democracy. So do social democrats, such as John Dewey and James Carey, who regard communities without conversation as little better than animal gatherings of intellectually passive creatures. John Stuart Mill and Elihu Katz, yet further toward the center, uphold the liberal belief that conversation is a key step in the formation of public opinion in the space between press and parliament. Feminists and post-colonial theorists have long called for encounter and dialogue as contrasts to sexist and racist oppression. Even conservatives sign on: the fallen cyber-prophet George Gilder (1992) bluntly called broadcast television "totalitarian" in its one-way flow of programming and lack of interactivity, celebrating digital television for allowing dialogic creation of content. One could multiply examples denouncing monologue and praising conversation from diverse political and intellectual points on the spectrum; the archbishop of Canterbury is not only a fan of The Simpsons but of conversation as a theological ideal. We live in the age of conversation. It is one of the unquestioned goods of the moment and a normative ideal of how the media are expected to work in a democracy.

If conversation is a good thing, then its absence is a bad one. The notion that media have usurped our powers of conversation is one of the stock images from the repertoire of meditations on how the twentieth century went bad. Perhaps the most explicit critique of modern media as destroyers of conversation is Harold Adams Innis (1991, 191-2). "The quantitative pressure of modern knowledge has been responsible for the decay of oral dialectic and conversation. The passive reading of newspapers and newspaper placards and the small number

of significant magazines and books point to the dominance of conversation by the newspaper and to the pervasive influence of discontinuity, which is, of course, the characteristic of the newspaper, as it is of the dictionary." Oral talk, he asserts, is distinct from "the cruelty of mechanized communication" which marks the modern world. Note that later arguments directed to television here aim at the newspaper. More recently, the Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti has written a book "on the social impact of the mass media" called The End of Conversation. Many others could be summoned to bear witness of the modern silences between people: existentialists, mass society theorists, or popular songwriters from Joni Mitchell to Thom Yorke.

The pathos of media-without-conversation seems here to stay; the lonely viewer seems largely false empirically, even if it is a metaphor that's too convenient to disappear any time soon. The cognitivists tell us that watching TV is an extremely complex attentive process; the ethnographers have found a variety of talkative behaviors, some outlandish, some mundane, that audiences perform in front of their sets. As a negative picture of an ideal, however, the nightmare of the aphasic audience raises the legitimate concern that the lifeworld can become spiritually or humanly hollow in an age of consumption and home entertainment. The task is to find better modes of critique, to diagnosis distortions in daily life with a scalpel, not an ax. The media serve stand as part for the whole in mediations on modernity. The fear of muteness is a variant in the defining twentieth century worries about alienation.

It is also the mirror image of the normative account of how media and conversation relate. Here media stimulate conversation. Mill thought that parliament was a receiver of mass communication, and that the press would stir up and focus discussion throughout the land. In a similar spirit, the Columbia notion of the two-step flow suggests that media do not ruin or distort conversation; they supplement and inform it. Both the lament and the hope for media and conversation point to a curious consensus. How to understand this agreement? Why do thinkers normally so contentious about everything else agree on conversation? When everyone agrees on something it is usually a sign of a hegemony of some sort. Conversation's definition is plastic and can range from descriptive to normative, from chatter to soulful communion, from the artful dodging of courtly conversation, the bourgeois authenticity of intimacy, to the soul-flights of Platonic or Buberian dialogue and micro-analyses of conversation

analysis. The stakes in arguments about this protean concept are always bigger than what is falsely called mere talk, and in what follows I hope to nuance the argument by placing it in the context of two long-term historical trends regarding media and conversation.

Media as Conversation

A subtler understanding suggests that media themselves engage in conversation with us by mimicking speech styles and genres from ordinary life. Media as conversation suggests many models: cocktail parties (where hundreds of conversations may happen at once, no single person being privy to more than a couple at one time), the representation of conversation by media (such as talk shows including a studio audience), or the positioning of media audiences as eavesdroppers on dialogue (in many ads and dramatic programs). I intend something more specific: the use of interactive styles in media talk and formats as if to address viewers-listeners as conversation partners. In advertisements, political oratory, or newsprint the world is full of personae who bid to have dialogues with us. Such discourse can have conversational markers such as “turn-taking, turn-packaging, indications of mutual knowledge, and paralinguistic features” (Myers, 1994, 113). What Malinowski called “phatic communion”—the rituals of staying in touch—is certainly found in radio, TV, and advertising voices: “and now this”; “don’t touch that dial!”; “you pay only \$15.99,” etc. The discourse formats of broadcasting are rarely elevated oratory delivered to whom it may concern, but eyeball to eyeball attempts at personal relationships.

The call for more conversation ignores the ways that media have already expropriated its styles and strategies. Hillary Clinton said in the early 1990s that what America needed was 23 million conversations, but perhaps the problem is not that the world has too little conversation in it; it has too much. Or at least of the wrong kind.

The most famous conception of media as conversation is the notion of parasocial interaction. Analyzing such late 1940s programs as “the Lonesome Gal” in which a sultry voiced female actor carried on a sexy monologue addressed to her radio audience of fellow lonely hearts (she actually got married secretly during the series), Horton and Wohl (1956) explored the way that radio and television stage a scenario in which the audience is invited to feel a personal connection with characters, actors, or announcers. Parasocial interaction involves a suspension of

disbelief about one's air friends. It borders, in the traditional interpretation, on a delusional fantasy that fails to distinguish fact ("real people") and fiction (media figures). The essence of parasocial interaction is its "simulacrum of give and take." Horton and Wohl invite us to see more in media than one-way edicts. Television discourse, like radio discourse before (at least in the United States and England) sought to establish cozy relations with its audiences--"up close and personal" in the phrase of ABC guru Roone Arledge.

A lingering question is the legitimacy of such conversation. Is it "conversation" in quotation marks? Is there something abnormal, even pathological, about conversations in which the participants cannot hear each other talk or even know of each other's existence? The "para" in "parasocial" is reminiscent of "paranoia": one imagines there are enemies out there, the other thinks there are friends.

One vote for the authenticity of broadcast conversation comes from Paddy Scannell, who offers the arresting thesis that mass communication historically ends rather than begins with radio broadcasting. He is not referring to size of audiences but to style of address. Broadcast programmers, facing an audience listening in the privacy of their homes, had to invent styles and formats that compensated for the alienation implicit in large-scale address and that fit the more intimate context of the household. "Involvement-structures of talk" were developed that allowed a sense of intimacy. Even though radio listeners might imagine themselves part of a nationwide community, their experience of radio address was as individuals or small groups, not as faces in a vast throng. Old styles of public oratory were duds over the airwaves.

One of the large trends of media discourse since the late nineteenth century in the industrial world is its increasing conversationalism. Scannell shows how the BBC, for instance with its first director of Talks, Hilda Matheson, experimented with colloquial and dialogic modes of speech. The same is clearly true in American radio in the 1930s and 40s, from crooner Rudy Vallee's vaunted ability to sing as if he were singing to each member of his audience alone through a rich history of radio comics, journalists, and dramatists (McCracken, 2000). Today, in talk shows and call-in shows, news shows and political campaigns, infomercials and internet pop-ups, conversationalism rules, although the home audience is rarely anything but a virtual (imaginary) participant in the flow of talk.

Before broadcasting, the history of advertising language (copywriting in particular) was one of increasing mimicry of everyday talk (even if the oh-so-ordinary chatter in ads was often been horribly stilted). Where ads in early nineteenth century newspapers were sober and informative, prose stuffed into a tight, visually uninviting patches of print, later in the century advertisers explored visually appealing glimpses into everyday lives, with snatches of overheard conversation providing us with clues about what medicines to buy or what biscuits to eat (Leech, 1966, ch. 19). As Thomas Leonard (1999) argues, one of the chief motors in the history of American journalism is what he calls democratic marketing--the use of a variety of gimmicks (coupons, beauty and recipe contests, give-aways) to conjure into being a public of newspaper readers (and subscribers). The long-term shift from sober, syntactically complex styles to jazzier, vernacular, visual sometimes crass expression accompanies (or makes possible) the expansion of American newspaper circulation from an elite few in the early nineteenth century to millions at the turn of the twentieth. Other countries have similar paths.

Something similar happens, argues Kathleen Jamieson (1988) in the history of political oratory in the United States. In the early twentieth century political speech-making was largely masculinist and martial, confrontational and aggressive, represented by Teddy Roosevelt's pulpit-banging. By the end of the century, the dominant style, represented for her by Ronald Reagan though Bill Clinton or Tony Blair makes the point just as well, is marked by sincerity and self-disclosure, human-interest stories and personal vignettes of a sort that classical rhetorical theorists would have disparaged as hopelessly feminine. In a capitalist society that treats the persuasion of audiences as essential for profits it is no surprise that communicative styles have evolved from sender-oriented to audience-oriented. The simulation of conversation is one of the major features of public discourse today.

Media discourse invites a rethinking of what counts of conversation. For my part, I find the chaotic conversational coupling of media and audience as suggestive for all kinds of talk, mediated or not (in a larger sense, as Goffman knew, all talk is mediated anyway). Theorists who lament the decline of conversation are often too strictly normative in what they accept. Parasocial interaction, for instance, should be relieved of its stigma as a psychic disturbance, however mild, that afflicts fans and immature people. Why is a sign of mental

illness to converse with entities that cannot quite reply--walls, books, oneself, or TV sets, when one-sided conversations are actually fitting for all kinds of settings, such as writing, prayer, reading, reverencing the dead, communing with babies, pets or plants? To speak in settings where no response is guaranteed is not unusual. Monological forms are not necessarily corrupt. We practice them when we publish, lecture, or even converse with another face to face. The concept of parasocial interaction, in showing that people simulate conversation in imagined relationships, reveals something relevant for all social relationships, not just mediated ones (ask any teenager in love for the first time). Hermeneutics is, essentially, one-sided correspondence: a dialogue with texts that cannot reply. Parasocial interaction is only the tip of the iceberg--the ways in which we live amid exploded conversations, turns that never quite connect.

The conversationalization of public discourse has its critics. To some, media-simulated conversation is simply the *modus operandi* of media without conversation. Adorno provides such a critique in his notion of pseudoindividualization, that is, of false intimacy, a fake personal address based on statistical guess-work. Adorno critiques not only the loudspeaker blasting away at stupefied publics, but more subtly, how being let in on the trick is often the trick itself. By clueing the audience to the deception, they are flattered into thinking they can see through the phony spell of the commodity, whereas all the others are duped. If everybody's somebody, nobody's anybody (as Gilbert and Sullivan put it), and if everyone is privy to the trick, the exposé of mass deception is the vehicle of mass deception itself. Parasocial clues, for Adorno, are a sly gesture of fraternization that ultimately excludes the audience, as it were, by its inclusion. The trick lies in fancying oneself favored by the media gods instead of consigned to common stupidity.

Others are skeptical of the democratic claims to inclusiveness in conversationalized media. Norman Fairclough (1998, 145, 148, 160) defines conversationalization as "the colonization of public orders of discourse by the conversational practices of the order of discourse of everyday life." (Note the nifty reversal of Habermas's usual direction for colonization: the lifeworld overpowering the official system world.) Ordinary voices "are 'ventriloquized' rather than directly heard." He doesn't quite say what "direct hearing" would mean, but presumably he means a chance to speak without being subject to someone else's framing and editing--something of course that happens without media. "The fact

that conversationalization is so widely appropriated ideologically gives an aura of insincerity to even the most innocent and exemplary instances of it. Conversely, even where it is most clearly ideologically appropriated, the implicit claims it makes about common experience and equality put these issues on the public agenda . . ." (Fairclough, 1995, 14). Conversationalization steals the prestige of democratic discussion while doing little to make alternative voices heard, but since it does expose other voices, its political meaning is ambivalent (a Gramscian point.) By recoding the lifeworld media conversationalism may invent a dream of pure conversation that we never before experienced face-to-face. (Great conversation may be an fantasy-projection of the media.)

On the positive side of the ledger, we get a qualified yes from Livingstone and Lunt (1994, 29): "If not political participation, public forums such as access and participation programmes, can be thought of as social events and so involve formal, social participation." Chat shows are not just Adornoesque delusions, but sites in which some sort of social action is possible. Scannell (1996) argues that the long-term effect of public broadcasting has been to enlarge the public realm in a serious way, such that there is a genuine connection with the larger world for audience members. Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that the role of the audience as a passive spectator dwelling at one remove from the media can intermittently--not routinely--transfigure audiences into participants at a distance, or better yet, that distance itself can dissolve into a kind of festive presence. On the right occasion, the public coalesces and fantasies step off the screen into the realities of daily life. Media events are not collective delusions they are conjurings of social substance. Here the vision of media conversationalism is not pathology (as in parasocial) or ideology (as in Fairclough), but ritual accomplishment.

Conversation as Media

If media discourse has become increasingly conversationalized over the past century, conversation has become increasingly mediated. Not only is the twentieth century the age of dialogue as salvation, but of dialogue as mishap and breakdown. All around us, we find disturbances of conversation. In Kafka's stories, derailed turn-taking systems are either cosmically unsettling or absurdly funny; in the Marx Brothers' films, communication breakdown is a constant theme enacted in non-sequiturs. Asks Groucho: have you received the answer to my wire? Answers Chico: No, I haven't sent it yet. Groucho: In that case don't send

it. There is a deep skepticism about the naturalness of conversation that extends from Woody Allen's movies to the sociological studies of Goffman, Garfinkel, and Sacks. Goffman named the experience of "alienation from interaction" and thought the dyad too simple a category, pulling each speaker apart into animator, author, and principal. In the plays of Sartre, Beckett, Ionesco, or Havel, the novels of Woolf, Camus or Kundera, the films of Bergman or Antonioni, people only rarely connect. Twentieth-century culture is full of dialogue-follies. How our conversational habits might have changed historically is an extremely difficult question, but intellectually, conversation-skepticism is a feature of our life just as artistically, the representation of conversation has been enormously complicated in drama, philosophy, literature, film, and yes, linguistics. (One of the most obvious things about any transcript of a conversation, even with a simple transcription system, is just how much messier conversation is than it usually seems to us.)

The widespread nervousness about conversation may owe much to modern speech-machines that reorder interaction. Telephones cut conversations in two, sound recording stores them for later playback, microphones selectively amplify voices, radio disembodies voices as film reembodies them. By conversation as media, I mean not only the fact that media fare can become a topic in everyday talk, but that everyday talk takes on the characteristics of media. In richer societies, much of our interaction is enabled by interpersonal media such as e-mail and telephone, sites in which the broadcast and the interactive are hard to tell apart. In what we might call the great communications shift face-to-face communication has taken on features once associated with mass (uncertainties of address, delays of response, dubious delivery) at the same time that broadcast discourse has assumed dialogic features. Mass and interpersonal communication have switched places, rather like the "Negroponte switch" in which the air now carries telephony and wires now carry broadcast programs. In private life, many of us talk like Beckett characters; in public discourse, celebrities present themselves as if they are our friends.

Perhaps the first case of a media-deranged conversation is found in the beginning of Aristophanes' play The Knights: two slaves have stolen a jug of wine, and even more daringly, the scroll with an oracle's message on it, from a sleeping politician. One pulls out the scroll, starts to read and says to the other something like, pour me some wine, would ya? And his friend is amazed that the oracle is talking about wine drinking. (Aristophanes milks the confusion for a few more

yucks; dialogue jams are the endless resource of comedy). The second slave fails to recognize the distance between remote and local commands; he takes what is dialogue as mediation, what is oral as written. Writing lacks the sense-making environment provided by the pragmatic situation.

The new forms of writing light, sound, and text in the nineteenth century such as film, gramophone, and typewriter only added to confused talk (Kittler, 1999). By the late nineteenth century, observers were noting already that strange things were happening to conversation. Mark Twain's 1880 story (1917, 204-208), "A Telephonic Conversation," is ironically titled, as the joke is that we can only hear one half of the conversation:

Then followed that queerest of all the queer things in this world--a conversation with only one end to it. You hear questions asked; you don't hear the answer. You hear invitations given; you hear no thanks in return. You have listening pauses of dead silence, followed by irrelevant or unjustifiable exclamations of glad surprise or sorrow or dismay. You can't make head or tail of the talk, because you never hear anything that the person at the other end of the wire says.

Twain then offers an account of one such "conversation," a premise to indulge in a series of droll non-sequiturs, such as:

Pause.

It's forty-ninth Deuteronomy, sixty-fourth to ninety-seventh inclusive. I think we ought all to read it often.

Pause.

Perhaps so; I generally use a hair-pin.

Twain is facing a brave new fact: mediated conversation. The schizophrenic splitting of telephonic speech has become ordinary for us today.

Thomas Edison (1888) noted something similar eight years later. "But the phonograph receives, and then transmits to our ears again, every least thing that was said--exactly as it was said--with the faultless fidelity of the instantaneous photograph. We shall know for the first time what conversation really is; just as we have learned, only within a few years, through the instantaneous photograph, what attitudes are taken by the horse in motion." Edison thus predicts conversation analysis, something that had to wait until the 1960s. Machines such as the telephone and phonograph, and their long progeny, probably had much to do with the creation of the very notion of conversation.

They at least contributed much to modern comedy. In his movie Rock a Bye Baby (1958) Jerry Lewis stands behind a tubeless television set and acts out a series of routines for his girlfriend's drunken father, who thinks he is watching TV. The humor lies not only in Lewis's antic mimicry, but the violation of the boundary between broadcast discourse on the tube and interactive presence of the body. There is something unholy, even idolatrous, about conversing with media, as we confuse machines and people, the animate and the inanimate, the near and the far. We face micro-macro confusions. In Bruce Springsteen's song, "57 Channels and Nothin' On" he shoots his TV after his girlfriend leaves; Carol Burnett, playing a lonely drunkard in the silly film Little Orphan Annie, takes a parasocial relationship to an absurdly literal extreme by snuggling and smooching her radio set in bed. Synecdochic mix-ups occur in webs of mass communication whose reach is intimate. Springsteen and Burnett perform part for whole interactions with media that, in each case, mirror or substitute for the disordered interactions they have with "real life" lovers.

One of the great analysts of mediated conversation was Sigmund Freud (1960); again, the issue is jokes. Over and over, he reveals turn-taking gone haywire as one of the fundamental resources of humor. Many of his jokes involve conversations whose logic has run away from the inept attempts of the participants. The prospective groom thus goes with the marriage-broker to a young woman's house and while awaiting her appearance is invited to admire the family's impressive collection of silver items. Ever skeptical, the prospective groom points out that they could have been borrowed for the occasion. The broker replies, "Who'd lend these people anything anyway!" The marriage-broker's answer is a seemingly natural response (a turn in this adjacency-pair, as Sacks would call it) in the conversation, a reply designed to refute the groom's skepticism. But instead, it radically undermines his own position and reinforces what it was meant to dispel. Or take another Schadchen joke: The broker brings along a companion to reinforce his testimony of the prospective bride's excellence. What eyes she has, you must see for yourself, says the broker. What eyes she has, says the sidekick. What posture, says the broker. And what posture, says the sidekick. What an education, says the broker. And what an education, says the sidekick. Oh, and she also has a hunchback, says the broker. And what a hunchback, comes the echo. The humor, as Freud remarks, turns on the automatism of the conversational logic, the helplessness of the broker to deceive,

and his unwitting self-betrayal. The conversational motion somehow escapes the control of its participants, only to reveal his scheming in spite of himself. Freud believes that the truth will always out--slips of the tongue, jokes, dreams; you can't hide your love away. There is something deeply humane in these jokes, a kind of empathy for foolishness, but it all rests on turns of conversation that turn faster than their speakers can reckon with.

Isn't there something similar to conversing with a television set? The pathos and humor for Freud lies in the automatism of talk: the relentless flow of the conversation, its immunity to our intentions of control. (The phonograph: writing without a subject.) That conversation eludes us is something we have all experienced; the acuteness of this sense may be particularly modern. The misfires that Freud noted are institutionalized in the conversational efforts of promotional discourse generally: when I watched television in Athens, people speak rapid Greek at me, asking me to buy cigarettes and tampons. I can neither understand them very well nor tell them that I have no use for their goods, but they just keep flowing relentlessly along. The breakdowns of communication and conversation are registered in everyday speech, but happen all around us. We live increasingly among non-sequiturs. This is the fate of the bazaar of public life. As the great nineteenth-century physicist James Clerk Maxwell asked, what if the book of nature were a magazine? His question reflects a long-term trend, as Raymond Williams pointed out, the increasing miscellaneity of public discourse.

Conversation, in our common experience and representation of it at least, has often come to approach something like mass communication, in its miscellaneity, juxtaposition, automatism, and jumbled editing. Conversation has taken on properties first seen clearly in media. The publicity of scattered discourse--the chatter of the agora--has penetrated the lifeworld, much to the lament of Innis and his colleagues. This is like the "media without conversation" in its historical analysis, but not its implications. I disagree with the lament that conversation has died; rather, the yearning for perfect conversation was likely invented, or amplified, in the shadow of media. The problem with what Michael Schudson over two decades ago called the conversational ideal in media studies is not only that it misconstrues media, but conversation as well!

Some Conclusions

It is an irony that conversation should be held up as answer when it has long been diagnosed as diseased. Forms alone of communication matter less than what is done with them. Conversation is not the only format suited for democracy. We need both dissemination and dialogue. Anyone who has dealt with second- or third-world bureaucracy knows that a world in which only interpersonal communication existed could be a hell: no general announcements of rules or procedures, only the luck of getting someone's eye or exploiting personal connections. There is a place for a degree of formality in democratic discourse. Starch can be as valuable as sweat-shirts. There is a need for presentational modes as well: dialogue is not the only way to carry culture. Anyone learning a new language knows that conversation is scarier than newspapers or television, since failure to understand is both highly annoying to others and potentially embarrassing if you pretend to understand; the stakes in dialogue are always intensified. Dissemination offers the relief of tuning out or going at one's own speed. There is a dignity in mass communication, and a proper place and time for an aesthetics of awe, a decorum of hushed audiences. Listening to others is a profound democratic function. Perhaps public service media will always be somewhat stiffer than commercial ones; but they get to have the chimes of Big Ben. Much of culture is nonreciprocal in form.

Like all media, conversation creates monopolies of knowledge; it can be tiring, impractical, and exclusive. Conversation, for instance, rarely allows for an extended performance (a lecture, a concert). "Passive listening" is one of the worst ideas ever to infest cultural criticism--as if listening were not one of the most difficult things people ever do. Dialogue presupposes silence, indeed it demands it. Dialogue is not always active and participatory (Socrates' dialectic is one-way: it is a rare event indeed when he himself is transformed by dialogue). Dialogue only lets one voice speak at once. If we are serious about finding democratic forms of communication, we should appreciate formats that allow many to take part at once: singing, voting, dancing, striking, worshipping, protesting, cheering, petitioning. Watching and listening can be intensely active practices--as audience researchers tell us--and they are collective forms. Dialogue is valuable, but it is a strict and jealous god. It is not the most vernacular form of political talk, but the most demanding and difficult; it offers not self-expressive pleasure, but self-denying listening. Conversation is no more free of history, power, and control

than any other form. It is a style of communication that can be demotic and playful, invigorating and demanding, but certainly not exhaustive of the communicative forms native to either our species or to democratic life. There is a necessity, even occasional nobility, in nonconversational forms.

Compare Greek tragedy and comedy in norms of audience decorum. In comedy, the audience is invited to participate; in tragedy a hushed tone prevails. Comedy's beginnings and endings are less crucial for understanding the plot, since the playwright knows the audience may be too busy talking to listen; Aristophanes regularly has a long warm-up dialogue while the audience settles down before he launches the plot. Tragedy starts at once. Applause may interrupt the State of the Union address, but not a symphony. Forms of communication, happily, are heterogeneous. We would be impoverished if all learning were via conversation, and if we had to discover everything afresh (Socrates thought so, but he could also be awfully tedious). It would also be bleak and alien if we only had presentational modes. Genres of deliberation and presentation, participation and passivity, are both key. Conversation is a very valuable genre, but certainly not the only one. Inasmuch as life can sometimes be tragic as well as comic, we need more than conversation to anchor our theories of media and democratic life.

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Contrapuntal Cultures: from minorities to moralities in European media

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Abstract

This exploratory paper has two starting points: recently completed empirical work on minority media in Europe; and a number of observations by Edward Said both on his own experiences of exile and on the nature of nineteenth century English and French literature, which focus on the character of counterpoint, the contrapuntal. I want to suggest that the notion of the contrapuntal could be a key one in the study of the media in multicultural Europe and that such study in turn raises some of the most profound questions about our mediated relationships to each other.

A recent [Media@lse](#) study of minority media in Europe (Georgiou 2003) has thrown up a number of key questions for scholars of communication, questions that quickly outrun the specific domain defined by the empirical focus of the research. I want in this paper to discuss some of these questions and link them together. In so doing, I will be tracing an argument which moves from the empirical to the normative. I will argue that the perspective that a study of minority media generates is one that offers significant challenges for how we should understand media culture *tout court* and as a consequence enables us to address some of the key moral dilemmas for and within communication and mediation in the twenty-first century.

It is an argument which turns on the issue of diversity. Diversity between, and within, the number of cultures, languages and ethnicities within (and beyond) Europe. Diversity in the relationships between dominant and subordinate media institutions. Diversity of technologies and platforms. Diversity amongst audiences and producers and diversity in their location. Diversity in the patterns of inclusion and exclusion across and within nation states. And diversity in those states' cultural and economic policies towards both established and recent migrants. But it is an argument which also turns on the issue of integrity. The integrity of media cultures or media spaces, notwithstanding the various strains to convergence, contradiction and conflict within them. The integrity of media cultures or media

spaces notwithstanding the multiple and overlapping networks of local, national and global communication. The integrity which the processes of communication and mediation themselves require us to address and understand: the integrity of voice and response; the integrity of tolerance, reciprocity and responsibility in the communications we have with others and they with us.

Analytically the issue – hardly new for the social sciences – is that between the whole and its parts, and the expectation that we have a responsibility to make some sense of the complexities of the world in which we and others live alongside each other, a world in which mediated communication has become a *sine qua non* of everyday social life. Politically the issue – equally well trodden – is how to create and sustain a mediated public space in a world scarred by communication failure and, ironically, by its very success. And morally and ethically the issue is to clarify and communicate the criteria according to which that public space can both be enabled and judged.

As Hannah Arendt has tellingly observed:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other ... (Arendt 1998).

At the core of this dialectic of relating and separating, indeed the axis on which the whole of mediated communication turns, is the stranger: that other whose presence or absence is crucial for our own sense of self and in relation to whom identities and communities are created and sustained. The stranger, and how we relate to, and represent, him or her, is also (implicitly) at the core of my own discussion in what follows.

The second thread in the argument which I intend to pursue revolves around the musical idea and technique of counterpoint. Edward Said (Said 1994; Said 2001), on a number of occasions and in different contexts, refers to the contrapuntal as a metaphor for addressing the structured complexity both of his own experience of exile and of the nature, principally, of the novel in nineteenth century, imperial, France and Britain. The contrapuntal speaks to the inevitable, continuous and

significant juxtaposition of elements and threads in a life, a text, a history, and to the necessity for an analytic which confronts that juxtaposition and deconstructs it. Counterpoint, the contrapuntal, will inform, explicitly, my own discussion in what follows.

Media and minorities in Europe

The research which provides the starting point for these discussions was conducted under the rubric of media and minorities in Europe¹. Each one of these terms needs a brief elucidation.

Media is to be understood as a socio-technical process of mediation, in which the media (print, broadcast, computer, and various network technologies) intervene in the processes of individual and institutional communication and provide a framework for the transmission and reception, translation and appropriation, of meanings in public and private, local, national and global settings (Silverstone 1999). Mediation requires both production and reception to be understood as dynamic and creative, and necessarily inter-related. And both production and reception need in turn to be firmly grounded sociologically, politically and historically as both contextualising, and contextualised in, the specific circumstances and settings of their mutual engagement. Our study of minority media consequently was grounded in the contemporary, principally ethnic, minority everyday life experiences of local, national and transnational media in the nation states of the European Union and in relation to those states' policies on multiculturalism.

The minorities themselves were identified through a series of national mapping exercises and individual case studies. Some 75 distinct groups or communities among recent and well established minorities with populations of over 1000 were, non exhaustively, identified within the European Union, and their media practices discussed and analysed. The groups themselves varied significantly in size, composition, culture and history. The focus of the research was on the presence of distinct media in these groups' everyday lives and the consequences of their engagement with those media, as well as with mainstream national and global media, for an understanding of their inclusion and exclusion in their host society.

¹ The project, and network within which it was a component was funded by the EU within the 5th Framework Programme.

The focus was also on the ways in which the full range of media to which they had access (from their own press and radio, to national broadcasting, satellite television from their countries of recent or distant origin, and the world wide web) enabled or disabled their efforts to build identity and community within and also beyond the boundaries of national culture and contributed to or ameliorated their experiences of exclusion.

We classified and discussed six contexts of mediation: two local, two national and two transnational.

The first of the local contexts involves an appropriation of urban space, through the creation or use of neighbourhood telephone, internet or video hire centres. These spaces, sometimes more or less exclusive to specific ethnic groups, sometimes shared in a multicultural neighbourhood, sometimes central urban facilities heavily used by minorities (for example access to the internet in local authority libraries), provide both mediated and lived social and cultural resources in otherwise alien urban environments. The second of the local media contexts is provided by cultural and multicultural media outlets and projects, the first which are specific linguistically and culturally, comprise, often ephemeral and limited print (newspaper and journal) publications, though sometimes also radio and cable television. The second, multicultural broadcasting, brings together on a single spectrum and often as the result of national or at least top-down policy making, an integrated "public service" of multiple ethnic programming. Examples include *Couleur Locale* in Belgium, *Radio Multikulti* in Germany, *Colourful Radio* in the Netherlands and *Sesam* in Sweden).

The two national contexts for minority media are provided by the national policy context in which the presence of minorities are or are not recognised and their desire for mediated cultural expression are or are not supported. There are substantial variations in the ways in which governments provide such support, and these variations are reflected in the number and intensity of minority media in their countries, though such variations are, of course, also a reflection of the economic, political and numerical strength of each of the individual minorities. It should also be pointed out that many of the most recent of the refugee communities in Europe have no media of their own, their media invisibility both

reflecting and reinforcing their marginality or exclusion in the societies in which they find themselves.

The second of the national contexts is that provided by the mainstream press and broadcasting in which minorities are unlikely to find themselves satisfactorily represented, either as subjects and participants. This relative invisibility is often the catalyst for efforts to generate both an increased presence on mainstream national media but also to encourage governments to recognise and support minority media in such a way as to provide greater access for them on national spectra and frequencies.

There are different ways in which such national presence can be claimed.

The first is through direct visibility, both in the presence of members of ethnic groups in mainstream media as journalists as well as soap opera characters, or the presence, for example in the weekly *Perşembe* supplement in the German daily *Die Tageszeitung* during 2000, of a discrete culturally specific mediated communication within that same mainstream. The second is through a mediated communication, for example the web-site *New Vision*, run by members of the Ethiopian community in Britain both for their own community and for the wider group of refugees and refugee rights activists across the country, which seeks, from the bottom-up as it were, a wider audience than that defined by the particular group of producers.

The final expression of a national but culturally distinct medium might be illustrated by *London Greek Radio* which offers, in Greek, information for a national Greek audience on rights and social services available to them (and others) in the UK.

It is clear, however, that minority media are not exhausted either by the local or the national and indeed it is the transnational that provides an increasingly compelling context for media consumption. There are two dimensions of this relatively recent globalisation. The first is the presence of satellite television transmitted from, for want of a better term, the homeland. Once again the availability of such channels varies hugely across cultures, as does their significance for those displaced (we did not undertake audience research so can not produce data on the extent to which satellite television channels are actually consumed both on their own terms and in relation to other media). There are, for

example, some 30 Arabic satellite channels available across Europe (not including those from North Africa), and some 36 Turkish channels, and an increasing number of channels from Russia, Poland and the ex-Soviet states, as well as some 8 Hindu channels and 20 Spanish and Portuguese channels originating in South America, a smaller number of Western European Channels, though few, other than Arabic channels from Africa. There are indications that communities, especially those with limited resources and from countries which are likewise economically weak, with limited or no access to transnational television which are using the internet as an alternative.

Indeed, it is clear that the internet is an alternative, but quite a distinct, choice for communication within diasporic communities. Low costs of access and maintenance have enabled the rapid growth of on-line diasporic news and information sites, hosted by the displaced as well as by those in home societies. These are supplemented by specific search engines, for example the one dedicated to Spanish and Latin American web-sites hosted in Belgium. The information and news sites are remarkably convergent across cultures, and most are bilingual. Sites are also sometimes positioned as oppositional not so much to the mainstream media of the host country, but to the established voices emanating from their homeland or regions of origin. There are a number of Arabic sites that conform to this description, but they are not unique.

What questions and issues does this brief review raise? Certainly too many for me to cover in this paper. So let me select a few that seem to me to be particularly interesting and suggestive.

Diversity and integrity

Perhaps the first point to make is the diversity of minority media available to minority audiences in Europe. That is media produced specifically with the minority as the principal addressee. That diversity is of course neither uniform nor consistent. It varies between groups in terms of its availability and accessibility, and these variations are in turn, the products of differences in the range of the material and symbolic resources which minorities have at their disposal. Choices in media use can be and are made, constrained as they will always be by language and culture. But such choices also include, and are evident when it comes to

examining patterns of media use, access to the national mainstream media: national programming on radio and television, and to the local and the national press. Such diversity also is expressed in generational differences, at which our research hints, but which has been clearly demonstrated by others, most notably Marie Gillespie (Gillespie 1995).

The presence and availability of national mainstream media is crucial. They define empirically, that is through the experiences and practices of minority audiences, and conceptually, as I intend to argue, the context within which minority media have to be understood. In the same way, though obviously in an asymmetrical way, the presence of minority media in a given society now has to be seen as a context for understanding the mainstream, even for those audiences or institutions who are not aware of the presence of minority media in their national (or transnational) media cultures or in their own patterns of consumption. Minority media may be invisible within a national media culture, just as minorities themselves may be invisible on the screens of the mainstream (other than, as so often, in negative representations), but that invisibility does not erode their presence. Both minorities and their media exist as a continuous sub-text, occasionally appearing in, and being acknowledged by, occasionally challenging, occasionally defining and transcending (*Al Jazeera* is perhaps the most significant case in point) the dominance of the mainstream, and in so doing contributing to the integrity of a media culture, whether that is constructed at a local, national or global level.

There is, consequently, a second asymmetry to note here. And this is the, perhaps ironic, asymmetry in the sophistication in which in principle at least, minority as opposed to majority viewers and users are able to construct their mediated worlds; for those who have access to both minority and mainstream media can and do juxtapose the differences in mediated representations, for example when diasporic Palestinians in London switch between *Al Jazeera* and the BBC or CNN (Matar 2004), and in so doing display a degree of media literacy and competence in a complex media culture which most in the majority culture are unlikely to be able to do.

Two further issues follow from these observations. The first has to do with the role of the media in the diasporic experience, the second has to do with how we might come to understand European media culture or perhaps more realistically the media cultures of the nation states within Europe².

It is easy to romanticise the role of the media in a diaspora, just as it is easy to reify notions of diaspora (Anthias 1998). Research into the everyday lives of displaced minorities reveals the strains of displacement in many different respects. It also reveals the often limited role media has in those lives, given the material challenges of finding home, work and education. Media do have, however, a double and sometimes contrary significance, offering to diasporic groups various competing cultural spaces, alternative imaginaries, constructed in relation both to the national host-land and, in many cases, the national home-land³. To talk of identity and community in this context is perhaps premature, for processes of identification are continuous, contradictory and unstable both within and across gender and generation; and community-building, for the most part, remains at the level of the imagined, but without, for many, the uncomplicated constructive potential that Anderson assumed it had in the supposed singularity of the nineteenth century nation state.

Diasporic media, the culturally specific and, in use, the national mainstream, provide alternate and interwoven resources for sharing experiences across time and space: dislocation shades into location-seeking; the challenging experience of the present into memories of the past and dreams of the future. Media, particularly those of the host-land, provide continuous challenges to the integrity and dignity of minority cultures, both in their failure to include positive images, their reluctance to employ minority personnel, or simply in terms of the minority's

² Phillip Schlesinger (Schlesinger, P. (1993). "Wishful thinking: cultural politics, media and collective identities in Europe." Journal of Communication **43**(2): 25-42. and Kevin Robins, Robins, K. (1994). "The politics of silence: the meaning of community and the uses of media in the New Europe." New Formations **21**: 80-101. have articulated both their doubts and their anxieties about the viability of a European culture; and in most respects in the 10 years or so since they wrote little has changed. That is, little seems to have changed in mainstream culture. It is arguably the case, however, that trans-European cultures of a kind are forming precisely in the products of activities of various diasporas multiply displaced across the member states of Europe.

³ Mirca Madianou (Madianou, M. (2004). "Contested communicative spaces: rethinking identities, boundaries and the role of the media among Turkish speakers in Greece." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies). describes the Turkish minority in Greece as a "beached diaspora", a term which reflects the lack of meaningful homeland amongst a group of people who have "always" lived in Greece.

complete invisibility. Though of course the media too, both broadcast and on-line, provide much in the way of practical resources, in the way of information, support and the shareable commentaries, in news, soap opera or talk show, on the containing minutiae of everyday life.

As Myria Georgiou in her EMTEL report comments:

Media might celebrate essentialism, totality and a process of *smoothing the rough edges* of identities, or they might construct radical discourses of disengagement from the essentialist and hegemonic understandings of singular and holistic identification, and instead celebrate diversity and hybridity. In both cases, media project scenaria, which are negotiated and appropriated in everyday life and in the meeting of immediate and mediated experience in local, national and transnational spaces (Georgiou 2003).

Such a way of framing media in its relationship to everyday life has strong implications for how we might come to understand public culture in general and public culture in Europe in particular.

It is in the latter context that Ulrich Beck has defined Europe as cosmopolitan, and as cosmopolitan both from within, and without the necessary delimitation of the term to the international elite. In the present context it is worth quoting him in full:

The first and most obvious thing we have to recognise is that Europe today has been cosmopolitanised from within. There are roughly 17 million people in Europe today who can't possibly fit the ethnocultural definition of European-ness due to their skin colour or religion, but who nevertheless understand themselves, and identify themselves, and organise themselves culturally and politically, as Europeans. And that is only the beginning. Thanks to transnational obligations and interconnections, Europe, like the rest of the world, has been turning into a open network with blurring boundaries, where outside is already inside. Europe is if anything in the vanguard of this process (Beck 2003).

I can take a good deal from this observation without necessarily endorsing either its optimism or its reification, for it is of course not yet the case that the European cosmopolitan identity is as pervasive, as powerful, as uncomplicated, as available, as welcome or even as benign as he suggests. His version of cosmopolitanism is, however, even in its embryogenesis, based on a model of society and culture which stresses its plurality and a socio-logic of non-exclusivity. The cosmopolitan

citizens of Europe are defined by their capacity to internalise the other; cosmopolitan citizens are individuals who incorporate otherwise global cultures into their own sense of themselves, living not so much in relation to a necessarily national past but in relation to a global future, and refusing to accept the constraints of national borders or singular social systems. The cosmopolitan citizen is a "patriot" of two worlds "[which] are at the same time equal and different". She occupies the both/and rather than the either/or of culture.

Minorities in European societies are, plausibly though not often very comfortably, cosmopolitan in Beck's definition of the term, and the culture they occupy is, and must be understood, as plural, in the sense in which I think he means it, that is as constituted through, and ethically and morally sensitive to, the presence of the other⁴. But more importantly it is the quality of multiple differentiation and shifting boundaries, albeit often painful and resisted, that constitutes what he sees as the defining characteristic of European society. This involves the incorporation of a kind of globality into the cultural fabric as a result directly, if not exclusively, of the substantial amount of migration that has taken place, and continues to take place within, at least, the states of the European union.

If we take this observation, as I now propose to do, into the realm of media and mediated public culture, it becomes clear both that, albeit unevenly and unequally, European society, or more properly European societies, are no longer the singular national cultures that they once were, with some reason, presumed to be. The heterogeneity within European societies is certainly a product of the movements of populations but it is also the product of the movement of images and words, narratives and information. That diversity is both a mediated one and one defined by the presence and power of the media as institutionalised networks of communication.

We have yet, however, to produce a framework for the analysis of those media cultures, an analysis which might reflect and express not just their variations, but the patterns and structures in the ways they are experienced.

⁴ Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt both dwell on questions of plurality and pluralism. I have briefly discussed the concept in the context of Berlin's work in (Silverstone, 1999). There is, inevitably, another point to be – and that is to note that so often, and particularly so in contemporary society, these relations are by no means harmonious; on the contrary.

It is this task which I now want at least to begin to attempt.

Contrapuntal cultures

To do so I need to engage, albeit superficially, with musical theory, and hopefully less superficially, with the work of Edward Said. The link between them is the notion and the practice of counterpoint: the contrapuntal.

Let me begin with musical theory.

Counterpoint is defined in a fifteenth century musical treatise as follows:

Counterpoint is a moderate and reasonable concord which arises when one tone is placed opposite another, from which also the term *contrapunctus*, that is 'note against note' can be derived. Counterpoint is therefore a combination of tones. If this combination or mixture sounds sweetly to the ears, it is called *consonance*; if, on the other hand, it sounds harsh and unpleasant, it is called *dissonance*... (Tinctoris, *Liber de Arte Contrapuncti*, 1477, <http://www.contrapunctus.com/contrapunctus.htm>, (accessed 23.09.02))

This is obviously a term which emerges from the distinctiveness of Western musical culture, and may have little relevance to others. Nevertheless the key idea is the presence in a single discourse of more than one voice. That those voices only gain meaning from their co-presence. That their relationship is always in tension. That the whole does not exist without their co-presence. That the relationship between these voices (or musical lines) is open, dynamic and fluid. That their interrelationship can create consonance and dissonance (though which may well depend on the sensitivities of the listener, and dissonance may be either intended or pleasant, or both (Nicholls 1990)). That the dominant (the proper voice leading) is never singular or secure, and that the subaltern voice or voices can be present even in their inaudibility, but shaping the final musical score by their influence – a kind of dominance in absentia.

The important thing, as I understand it, about counterpoint, is that every theme requires another in order to be meaningful, and that the relationship between such themes or elements creates the "music" of the whole. In a more sociological or philosophical register, the contrapuntal signals the ever and necessary presence of the other, the stranger, in time and space, as a point of reference and as a

irredeemable contribution to the significance of the present, of the here, the now and the self.

For Said, the contrapuntal is a pervasive metaphor. It appears in his work in a number of places and in a number of guises. So much so that it might appear to be, even in its inconsistencies (there are at least five or possibly six different ways in which he uses the term), an *idée fixe* in his work as a whole. If I review the different manifestations of the contrapuntal in his writing very briefly now it is not merely as an academic exercise, but in order to make a substantive and an epistemological claim directly relevant to an understanding of minority media, and its implications for a wider more normative approach to the study of mediated culture.

The starting point, appropriately enough, is Said's description of his own status as an exile. Being in exile has some compensations, as well as its obvious pain. They follow from the experience of seeing and being in "the entire world as a foreign land". Exilic vision is always plural, generating an awareness of simultaneous dimensions of culture. Said's primary characterisation of the contrapuntal is, therefore, experiential:

For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgement and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be
....Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew (Said 2001).

But this metaphor for the specific experience of exile extends into his substantive analyses of culture and text. And it does so in a number of dimensions, all of which can be found in his *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1994; Said 2003).

The first is the dimension of culture as such in which the contrapuntal appears as a way of identifying both identity and history as ensembles. "...no identity", he argues, "can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites" (Said 1994),

and histories are similarly coeval and co-existing even in their differences and discrepancies. However it is his literary theory and his analyses of the text, above all the novel, which provide the most direct application of the idea of the contrapuntal, both as a substantive claim and as an epistemological position.

One further quote from him:

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally, but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those histories against which (and altogether with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. In the same way we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalised or discursively stable entities (Said 1994).

The generic argument is that literary texts both are, and therefore must be read as, contrapuntal. The counterpoint appears to exist in three dimensions of such texts. It first of all consists in the sociologically identifiable sub-texts present, even in their absence, in the novels, for example, of the late eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century (Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus are key figures in his canon, and imperialism is the key sub-text). But it also consists in the presence of oppositional and resistant writing, which in a colonial and post-colonial environment appears against but also alongside that of the mainstream. And finally the contrapuntal appears as a way of characterising the process of reading in which novels are read again and read differently as time passes and cultures change. The significance of the contrapuntal lies in its doubling (or trebling or quadrupling), and the presumption is made that there is an identifiable integrity which is constituted, but at the same time disturbed, by that doubling.

There is clearly an epistemology at work here. It is constituted against various kinds of essentialism, and depends, to a degree, on the absence as Said puts it, of

an “Archimedean point” (Said 1994) outside culture, some vantage point from which to observe without being a participant. This is all relatively familiar, though still important, and has a very specific relevance in the context of the analysis of media culture from which none of us can escape (Silverstone 1999). More significant, at least for the present argument, is the assertion of the distinctiveness of the contrapuntal as a way of approaching questions of cultural difference and cultural process which in turn avoid the essentialising fusion of hybridity theory, the inevitability of synthesis and resolution embodied in notions of the dialectic as well as the prescribed transgressiveness of, for example, Bakhtin’s carnivalesque⁵.

Thinking about culture as contrapuntal involves the recognition of a continuous and continuously changing mutuality of definition and identification between components of a culture or a mediated space. Such mutuality is expressed in different domains in different ways, yet it provides for a way of connecting the part and the whole, the plural and the singular, and what I have already discussed as the relationship between cultural integrity and diversity, without reducing the one to the other or insisting on a predetermined particular and continuous political or other relationship between the constituent themes or parts⁶.

Let me illustrate the ways in which the contrapuntal might usefully be introduced in the present context and thereby begin the process of connecting this rather abstract argument back to the empirical work on minorities and their media in Europe.

To start with the nature of the experience of migration, which is where I believe Said starts too. Migration is a process that unfolds in space. The *here I am* is always connected to and made meaningful by, especially, the presence of the elsewhere, the somewhere else, especially by the present absence of home. In this the experience of diasporic space is arguably contrapuntal. Migration is also a process that unfolds in time. The time of the here and now is always connected

⁵ These sweeping generalisations can not at all, of course, be substantiated in the present paper. They will be addressed fully in future work.

⁶ Again, another substantive issue emerges here, and that is the identification of the conversational as a paradigm for communication; whereas conversation presumes direct interaction, the contrapuntal suggests (at least epistemologically) that significance can be generated by its absence (see: Peters, J. D. (1999). Speaking into the Air: A history of the idea of communication. Chicago, Chicago University Press.

to, and made meaningful by, the presence of the past; perhaps, at least for first generations, the time of home, the time of origins, but also the time of the future. The experience of diasporic time is therefore also contrapuntal. My life as a first or second or third generation immigrant, my own relationship to the others in the face to face and the mediated worlds which I now inhabit, is only meaningful in its relationship to the cultures that I have both left and perhaps aspire to. Biography and history co-exist in a contrapuntal relationship⁷. Diasporic cultures can only be understood in their relationship to the multiple contexts of cultures that are both present and absent (Ganguly 2001).

But this relationship of integrity and difference is also visible in the realm of media culture, and insofar as mediated culture is a *sine qua non* of culture, in relation to the nature of our distinctly contemporary culture as a whole. Perhaps this is most clearly evident in the relationship between mainstream and minority media (but it is also present in the relationship between different minority media). Here the point is quite a simple one too; it is that the two can not be understood apart from each other. Minority media claim their space and gain their significance in relation to, against or alongside, the mainstream; but equally (though much more contentiously) the mainstream media themselves will have to be understood in their increasingly visible and contested relationships with minority media.

Media cultures in Europe are contrapuntal. Their component parts, the distinct, and relatively indistinct, media voices and presences within European cultural space together define an often unstable and contested territory, where relations of domination and subordination seem, for the most part, clearly defined and well entrenched. Yet those relationships are constantly changing, and in their changes – in relation to their relative audibility, visibility and their different audiences – constitute a whole⁸.

Specifically we can only grasp the meaning of a particular minority media initiative, and assess its significance, in its contrapuntal relationship to the presence of other

⁷ This relationship is, of course, claimed, as key by C. Wright Mills, Mills, C. W. (1959). The Sociological Imagination. New York, Oxford University Press.

⁸ The point can be made that counterpoint is not always heard by the listener; the integrity of the fugue, for example, is constituted by the composition and not necessarily the sound, see Cook, N. (1990). Music, Imagination and Culture. Oxford, Oxford University Press., page 35.

media and media texts which it addresses, contradicts or seeks to by-pass. Likewise we can only grasp the meaning of dominant mainstream media insofar as we register their contrapuntal relationship to the experiences, voices and practices of both the included and excluded (but still present) minorities. These draw on and in sounds, images and values from outside the boundaries of the mainstream and the national. In so doing, of course, they draw on other mainstreams. And in so doing they also challenge the integrity of the claimed boundaries around European culture and add a further contrapuntal layer to it, through their relationships to transnational media.

This discussion is not of course one that stops with an understanding of institutional relationships, nor is it one that can in any way be divorced from a concern with the political, with the relationships of power between the various institutionalised or semi-institutionalised voices. Media are only significant insofar as they generate meaning. And meanings are constructed in representational space, and through the presence and absence of distinct images and narratives. It is in these images and narratives, as well as in their exclusion from them, that media are inscribed into the hegemonic struggle (perhaps the bottom line, ground base of the contrapuntal) that cultures always manifest and mask. But it is also in these images and narratives that the significance of the other as the defining reference for an understanding of contemporary mediated culture emerges. It is to this issue, and to the wider, moral implications of my discussion of minority media, that I now, finally, wish to turn.

Defining the moral agenda

The key idea, therefore, that I have tried to take from the contrapuntal is the acknowledgement of the presence of the other that is ingrained in both its epistemological position and its substantive claims. This otherness, its presence, its absence and its character, is crucial. But it has a further significance, that goes beyond substance and epistemology. Our relation to the other, to the stranger, is the principal determinant of our moral worth and our status as human beings. Since our media provide the most pervasive and persuasive perceptual frameworks, in an increasingly global society, in which meanings, representations and relationships to the other are offered and defined; and since these media representations, in their consistency and in their power, tend to delegitimize and

marginalize other kinds of framings, and in so doing define the asymmetries, hierarchies, presences and absences of public space, then the contrapuntal relationships of self and other, of minority and majority, of minority and mainstream, of the distant and the close at hand, become increasingly material as the foundation for contemporary public life and for the articulation of its moral order and disorder.

An investigation of the particular dynamics of these relationships and representations of the other is a pre-requisite, I am arguing, for an understanding of the nature of the moral claims that media make on our behalf. These relationships are present in both the detail of nightly news reporting and constant advertising and, more visibly and intensively in the reporting of wars and catastrophes, but they are also present in the media's national and international institutional arrangements, as I have tried to illustrate, and in the politics surrounding minority media and minorities in media. In this context the contrapuntal shifts from an analytic to a normative category, and we are led to question, but required also to judge, the ways, and the consequences of the ways, in which the stranger appears or disappears in contemporary media.

Presence, absence; distance, closeness, but also responsibility, reciprocity, dignity, and trust. These are the dimensions of media that now assume their place as central for an understanding of media power in late modernity⁹. The challenge posed by such characterisations go beyond conventional and now relatively unchallenged versions of media influence or lack of it, for they address the fundamental presuppositions in the very acts of mediation, and at the same time, and possibly just as problematically, they presume a kind of media power that is not easily amenable to empirical analysis, certainly at least not that of audience response or media effects. The shift into the normative is not without its significant, but obvious, dangers, of course. And it might also involve a less audience centred epistemology. But it is required by the increasing globalisation of mediated representations and the increasing salience of, and dependence on,

⁹ These are clearly huge questions, and can not be dealt with in the current paper. Nevertheless they will be in future work; for the moment see Silverstone, R. (2003). *Proper distance: towards an ethics for cyberspace. Digital Media Revisited*. G. Liestol, A. Morrison and T. Rasmussen. Cambridge, Mass, The MIT Press: 469-490.; Silverstone, R. (2003). "Complicity and collusion in the mediation of everyday life." *New Literary History* 33(4): 761-780.

mediated representations in the everyday life of those otherwise distanced, and that is most of us most of the time, from the everyday life of others.

Perhaps I can return to the quotation from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* that I cited at the beginning of this paper. It continues as follows:

What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible (Arendt 1998).

Arendt's disappearing table destroys the necessary and proper distance between self and other (Silverstone 2003). It is, though she does not refer directly to it as such, a mediated table (though séances are media, and those who conduct them are referred to as media). The counterpoint of relating and separating, so crucial for the operation for an effective and humane public space is, in Arendt's formulation, dependent on the presence of a technology, material and objective, which provides a framework for publicness which is common, but shared by those, and indeed can only be effectively shared by those, who at the same time acknowledge and respect each other's difference. Such a public world must, in her view, have a life beyond the generations. The challenge she poses is that of being able to confront present media through an analysis which privileges, if not an ideal world, at least a world from whose perspective the present one falls short. But it is also one which highlights something perhaps we know already, but now must address in earnest. It is the capacity of media both to undermine as well as constitute the possibility of communication. It is media failure which should concern us now.

From this perspective, the monumentally heretical notion (at least within post-modern theory) of integrity appears as a significant. For without an idea of the whole there can be no examination of the relations of its parts, and without a shared understanding of what might constitute publicness there is no possibility of adequately recognising the politics and dynamics of consociation which the media both represent and enable but also misrepresent and disable.

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Silverstone, Roger, professor and director of media@lse the London School of Economic's graduate teaching and research programme in media and communications. His current research is two dimensional - the first an empirical study funded by the European Commission within its 5th Framework programme, on Media and Minorities in Europe. This is a unique and preliminary attempt to map the scale and character of diasporic media production and consumption in Europe. The second is encompassed within the title of a forthcoming book, *Screen Deep: Media, Ethics and Everyday Life*. Building on some ideas originally proposed in *Why Study the Media?* In his work he focuses on the morality of mediation, and in particular in the processes, always moral, by which mediation takes place and in which perceptions, understandings and values in relation to the experienced world, emerge at the interface between media and everyday life.

Internet, Public Spheres and Political Communication: Dispersion and deliberation

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For about a decade now many researchers and other observers have been asking whether the internet will have – or is already having – an impact on the public sphere, and if so, what are the attributes of this impact. Such discussions become unavoidably framed by the general international consensus emerging since the early 1990's, that democracy has hit upon hard times; more specifically the hope is often expressed that the internet will somehow have a positive impact on democracy and help to alleviate its ills.

Yet, given the variations in democratic systems and cultures around the world, and given the pace of change – social, political, and technological – we should not expect to soon arrive at some simple, definitive answer to the questions. Indeed, thus far the evidence seems equivocal; moreover, the conclusions one might derive are inexorably tied to the assumptions one has about the character of democracy. Rather than yielding any fast answers, we should acknowledge that the theme of internet and the public sphere now has a permanent place on research agendas and in intellectual inquiry for the foreseeable future. It is now entering the mainstream of concern for the study of political communication and taking its place along side the established research on the traditional mass media. We may occasionally still ask if the traditional mass media enhance or hamper democracy, but most research on this theme today takes as its point of departure the overall complexity of the situation, and focuses its questions on more specific features within the overall landscape. So too can we expect the research on internet to evolve – as well as highlighting the increasing technical convergences between mass and interactive media.

In the first part of the presentation that follows, I briefly pull together key elements in the public sphere perspective. I underscore three main analytic dimensions: the structural, the representational and the interactional. Then I address central themes in the current difficulties facing democracy, refracted through the lens of the public sphere perspective. In particular, the current destabilisation of political communication systems must be seen as a context for understanding the internet: it enters into, as well as contributes to, this

destabilization. At the same time, the notion of 'destabilisation' can also embody a positive sense, pointing to dispersions of older patterns that may not have outlived their utility and possibilities for reconfiguration. We can note, for example, the obvious positive consequences that the internet extends and pluralizes the public sphere in a number of ways. If this is a good or bad thing – not least in terms of system stability – is of course contingent on specific circumstances as well as one's views about democracy. It is this kind of tension that I would accentuate, rather than any cheery optimism, dour pessimism, or cavalier dismissal.

Thereafter I focus my attention on the interactional dimension of the public sphere. Specifically, I take up some of the recent research findings on how deliberation proceeds on the online public sphere in the current destabilised environment of political communication. I then consider the notion of deliberative democracy; while useful, I find that its rationalist biases, particularly in the context of extra-parliamentarian politics, limit its utility. I suggest that what I call civic cultures offers an enhanced way to understand the significance of online political discussion.

Democracy's communication spaces: three dimensions

At this point in our collective academic history there must be few people in political communication or media research for whom the notion of the public sphere is entirely unfamiliar. In this section I recapitulate the main elements in condensed form, and then take up some of the issues that derive from the concept.

In schematic terms, a functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates – ideally in an unfettered manner – and also the formation of political will, i.e. public opinion. These spaces, in which the mass media and now, more recently, the newer interactive media of course figure prominently, thus serve ideally to foster the development and expression of political views among citizens, as well as to facilitate communicative links between citizens and the power holders of society.

These spaces are constituted by both mediated communication and face-to-face interaction. That is, while in the modern world the institutions of the media are the institutional core of the public sphere, it is the face-to-face interaction, the ongoing talk between citizens, where the public sphere comes alive, so to speak, and where we find the actual bedrock of democracy. The key text here is of course

Habermas' (Eng. translation 1989). There are problems and ambiguities in his book, as many have pointed out (see for example, the collection by Calhoun, 1992), and I turn to some of these below. Yet, for many committed to a democratic society, the concept itself remains compelling, both empirically and a normatively. Habermas himself has returned to the concept, revising and updating in (cf. Habermas, 1996).

The notion of the public sphere has parallels with the liberal notion of 'the marketplace of ideas' and similar metaphors, though as an analytic category it situates the media/democracy theme in a broader historical and critical perspective. Indeed, we can note that the notion has increasingly entered into more general circulation of usage in recent years, while some of the original Frankfurt School ingredients (for example, the critique of capitalist media) have receded into the background – a development that no doubt draws different responses from different quarters. In some corners today it seems that 'the public sphere' could pass as a synonym for the more neutral, descriptive phrase 'the system of political communication', with its roots in political science – allowing for variations of emphasis and theoretical valences. Basically, the term signals in regard to media questions a commitment to democracy – though as we know, the term 'democracy' has several (competing) models and should not be reduced to a mantra.

As a starting point, I find it helpful to conceptualise the public sphere as consisting of three constitutive dimensions: structures, representation, and interaction. The structural dimension has to do with the formal institutional features of the public sphere. Most obviously this includes media organizations, their political economy, ownership, control, regulation, and issues of their financing, as well as the legal frameworks defining the freedoms of – and constraints on – communication. The structural dimension thus directs our attention at such classic democratic issues as freedom of speech, access and the dynamic of inclusion/exclusion. Beyond the organization of the media themselves, the structural dimension also encompasses society's political institutions, which serve as a sort of 'political ecology' for the media and set boundaries for the nature of the information and forms of expression that circulate. A society where democratic tendencies are weak is not going to give rise to healthy institutional structures for the public sphere – which in turn means that the representational dimension will be inadequate.

The term 'public sphere' is most often preceded by the definite article 'the', semantically signifying a unitary entity. The structural issue of one or many public spheres has been a pivotal theme in the literature over the years in regard to structure (see for example Thornton's ongoing discussion of this theme www.zip.com.au/~athornto//). Some argue forcefully in a normative way for a singular public sphere, at least in the context of the nation state - as was often done when public service broadcasting was promoted as the logical embodiment of the public sphere (cf. Garnham, 1992). Sociological realism, however, points to the plural. In large-scale, differentiated late modern societies, not least in the context of nation states permeated by globalisation, we have to understand the public sphere as plural, as constituting many different spaces. Whether we wish to use the somewhat awkward plural form or alternatively keep in mind that '*the* public sphere' is comprised of an intricate ensemble of spaces, is a matter of choice (I use both in this text).

In regard to the internet, the structural dimension directs our attention to the way in which the communicative spaces relevant for democracy are broadly configured. This has to do with such things as the manner in which cyber-geography is organized in terms of legal, social, economic, cultural, technical and even Web-architectural features. Such factors impact on the ways in which the net is accessible (or not) for civic use.

The representational dimension refers to the output of the media, the mass media as well as 'minimedia' that target specific small groups via, for example, newsletters or campaign promotion materials. And given the increasing 'massification' of communication on the internet, representation becomes highly relevant for online contexts of the public sphere as well. In this dimension one can raise all the familiar questions and criteria about media output for political communication — eg. fairness, accuracy, completeness, pluralism of views, agenda setting, ideological tendencies, modes of address, and so forth. There is a growing complexity about the representational dimension, which has to do with the increasing abundance and density of media output and the trends towards the mediatization of society and of the political realm (cf. Thomson, 1995; Castells, 2000).

In terms of the dimension of interaction, it may be useful to recall Habermas as well as other writers, such as Dewey (1954), who argue that a 'public' should be

conceptualised as something other than just a media audience. A public, according to Habermas and Dewey, exists as discursive interactional processes; atomised individuals, consuming media in their homes, do not comprise a public. With the advent of the public opinion industry (cf. Splichal, 20002; Lewis, 2001) there emerged strong tendencies towards defining 'the public' in terms of aggregate statistics of individual views, and certainly such approaches do have their uses. However, it is imperative not to lose sight of the classic idea that democracy resides, ultimately, with citizens who engage in talk with each other. This is certainly the basic premise of those versions of democratic theory that see the idea of deliberation as fundamental .

Interaction actually consists of two aspects. Firstly, it has to do with the citizens' encounters with the media — the communicative processes of making sense, interpreting and using the output. It is an old truism in communication theory that 'the receiver' does not necessarily derive the same meanings, or make the same uses, of 'messages' as the 'senders' intended. This perspective became particularly prominent in the qualitative audience reception research that emerged in the 1980's, and while the degree of audience interpretive freedom is at times contested among researchers, the active component of meaning construction within the media-audience interface is firmly established. The second aspect of interaction is that between citizens themselves, which can include anything from two-person conversations to large meetings. It is here where deliberation emerges. To point to the deliberation among citizens is to take a step into the social contexts of everyday life. Deliberation has its sites and spaces, its discursive practices, its psycho-cultural aspects; in this sense, the public sphere has a very fluid, sprawling quality, a view that correlates with what Alasuutari (1999) and others call the third generation of reception research on the mass media, where studies move beyond the actual sites of media reception and probe the circulation of meaning in broader micro-contexts of everyday life.

With the advent of the net, civic interaction – deliberation – takes a major historical step by going online, and the sprawling character of the public sphere becomes all the more accentuated. We should also recognize that empirically, the categories of representation and interaction on the net often blur into each other. We tend to think in terms of either 'one to many' forms of communication, as typified by the mass media, or 'one to one communication' that is paradigmatic of interaction (or, in other contexts, of interpersonal communication). This neat

distinction unravels on the internet, where for example, group communication can have attributes of both mass communication and interaction.

These three dimensions — the structural, the representational and the interactional — provide an analytical starting point for examining the public sphere of any given society, or the contribution of any given communication technology, as well as for evaluating the general democratic character of its public spheres.

Destabilised political communication

That contemporary democracies are facing difficult times has become an established topic in both the public debate and the research literature, and the evidence translates readily into issues in regard to the public sphere's structures, representations, and modes of interaction. While the discussions about the poor health of democracy intensified during the 1990's, 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 impacting on all spheres of life in late modern society is of course no news, but there remains ambiguity as to the extent to which they are enhancing democracy (cf. Anderson and Cornfield, 2003; Jenkins and Thorburn, 2003). One's understanding – and perhaps even appreciation – of this ambiguity grows as one's insight into the complexity of democracy's difficulties deepen.

In a recent overview Blumler and Gurevitch (2000) summarize the ways that the traditional systems of political communication in Western democracies are being destabilized by changes in late modern society (see also the collection by Bennett and Entman, 2001 for an overview of this landscape). They take up a number of by now familiar themes:

- increased socio-cultural heterogeneity, and the impact that this has on the audiences/actors within political communication.
- the massive growth in media outlets and channels, and discuss changes in the formats of media output, the blurring and hybridisation of genres, and the erosion of the distinction between journalism and non-journalism.
- not only more political advocates today, but also what they call political mediators, which includes the massive growth in the professionalisation of

political communication, with experts, consultants, spin doctors, etc. sometimes playing a more decisive role than journalists.

- the geography of political communication is in flux, as the significance of traditional national borders becomes weakened.
- cacophony emerges with such media abundance and so many political actors and mediators.
- growing cynicism and disengagement among citizens.

One can also add that deregulated, conglomerate media industries driven by market forces push increasingly to the margins all normative considerations (e.g. journalistic values) that do not enhance short-term profits (cf. Baker, 2002). The consequences of these transformations run deep, and the integration of the political communication system comes into question. This destabilization encompasses several, at times antithetical tendencies. On the negative side we can list chaos, inefficiency, unpredictability, etc. Also, the centripetal forces of private capital are coalescing under the prevailing neoliberal order, drawing power away from the formal political arena via a variety of mechanisms and thereby constricting and weakening democracy. On the positive side, we would certainly place such trends as the increase in political voices, new modes of political engagement and definitions of what constitutes politics. Further, cultural heterogeneity may suggest dispersions and openings that can be developed for democratic gains. Destabilisation can thus extend political communication through horizontal civic communication, as well as through vertical communication between citizens. Yet, again, it must be acknowledged that from a systems perspective, too much dispersion and polyvocality undercut political effectiveness and hamper governance.

To consider the role of the public sphere in general requires us to insert it into the force-fields of this historical setting. The public sphere is an expression of and a contribution to these force-fields, and this is all the more true as we consider its manifestations on the net. It is there that we find the real 'vanguard' of the public sphere, the domain where the most intense developments are taking place – what we might call the cyber transformation of the public sphere. Though we cannot be fully unequivocal here, we can still sketch some of the main vectors using the three dimensions I presented above. From the standpoint of structures, the

internet's political economy suggests that its development is quickly veering toward the intensified commercialisation that characterizes the traditional media model (Patekis, 2000). The internet has by now also become an integrated element in the dynamics of global capitalism (Schiller, 1999). Market logic together with emerging legal frameworks and the impetus toward political restrictions serve to constrain the extent and forms of representation for civic purposes in ways quite familiar from the mass media, diminishing its potential as a properly civic 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. The kinds of interaction taking place can only to a small degree be considered manifestations of the public sphere; democratic deliberation is completely overshadowed by consumerism, entertainment, non-political networking and chat, etc. Further, the communicative character of the political discussion that does not always promote the civic ideal; much of it is isolated (and at times unpleasant) and its contributions to democratic will formation cannot always be assumed (Wilhelm, 2000).

At the same time, we note that the present architecture of the net does still offer available space for many forms of civic initiative. The criteria for access and use are such that the 'digital divide' in the Western democracies has been diminishing, even if it would be unrealistic to assume that it will disappear (at the global level the prospects are quite remote, as is well known). The internet is becoming integrated with the established system of political communication, yet is also being used to challenge established power structures. Even the efforts of some more overtly authoritarian regimes around the world to curtail the democratic uses of the net have not been fully successful, though inventories of the mechanisms of control are sobering. The progressive and subversive role of the net should not be overestimated (Kalathil and Boas, 2003); 'closed systems' can short-circuit the potential gains to be had by online political conversation (Fung, 2002). Yet, for those with access and the political motivation, and who are living within open, democratic societies, the internet still offers very viable possibilities for civic interaction. Seen from a systemic view, however, its potential must be qualified, and it cannot offer any quick fix for democracy, a position that Blumler and Gurevich (2001) affirm in another recent article.

Multi-sector online public spheres

If the vision of a singular, integrated public sphere has faded in the face of the social realities of late modern society, so has much of the normative impetus that may have previously seen this as an ideal. The goal of ushering all citizens into one unitary public sphere, with one specific set of communicative and cultural traditions is usually rejected on the grounds of pluralism and difference. There must exist spaces in which citizens belonging to different groups and cultures, or speaking in registers or even languages, will find participation meaningful. Differences of all kinds, including political orientation and interests, gender, ethnicity, cultural capital, and geography can warrant specialized communicative spaces. At some points, certain groups may require a separate space where they can work out internal issues and/or cultivate a collective identity. Not least we must take into account alternative or counter public spheres (cf. Fenton and Downey, 2003; Asen and Brouwer, 2001), where political currents oppositional to the dominant mainstream can find support and expression. These were first formulated in terms of class ('the proletarian public sphere' – see Negt and Kluge, 1993) as a direct response to Habermas' emphasis on the bourgeois public sphere. Later, Fraser (1992) further developed the idea, not least with feminist horizons.

It is probably here where the internet most obviously makes a contribution to the public sphere. There are literally thousands of websites having to do with the political realm at the local, national and global levels; some are commercial, many not, some partisan, most are not. We can find discussion groups, chat rooms, alternative journalism, civic organisations, NGO's, grass roots issue-advocacy sites (cf. Berman and Mulligan, 2003; Bennett, 2003b), as well as voter education sites (see Levine, 2003, for a discussion of the growing importance of such sites in the American context). One can see an expansion in terms of available communicative spaces for politics, as well as an ideological breadth compared to what exists in the mass media. Structurally, this pluralisation not only extends but also disperses the relatively clustered public sphere of the mass media.

If the internet facilitates an impressive communicative heterogeneity, we should not ignore the negative side of this development, which is of course fragmentation, with public spheres veering towards disparate islands of political communication, as Galston (2003) argues. That various groups may feel that they must first coalesce internally before they venture out into the larger public sphere is understandable; however,

there is the strong risk that they remain in their respective cyber-ghettoes. This threatens to undercut a shared public culture and the integrative societal function of the public sphere, and may well even help foster intolerance where 'voluntary communities' have little contact with – or understanding of – one another. The formation of collective political will becomes hampered under such circumstances. Fragmentation also derives simply from the mushrooming of advocacy groups and the array of issues available. While traditional online party politics, and forms of e-government may serve as centripetal forces to such fragmentation, the trend is clearly in the direction of increasing dispersion.

The question of multi-public spheres glides readily into the issue of the links between the different spheres to the centres of decision-making. The public sphere per se is no guarantee for democracy: there can be all kinds of political information and debate in circulation, but there must be structural connections – formalized institutional procedures – between these communicative spaces and the processes of decision-making, as Sparks (2001) argues. This is in part an extension of the classic question of the relationship between public opinion and political decisions. There can obviously be no automatic, lock-step connection here – not without degeneration into a chaotic populism. Yet there must be some semblance of impact, some indications that the political talk of citizens has some consequences, or else disengagement and cynicism can set in. – as is precisely what many observers claim has been a pattern for a decade or so in the mainstream, mass mediated systems of political communication of the Western liberal democracies

Today the most notable gap between communication in the public sphere and institutional structures for binding decision is found in the global arena. Transnational forums, global networking and opinion mobilization are very much evident on the net, yet the mechanisms for transforming opinion at the global level into decisions and policies are highly limited to say the least. There are simply few established mechanisms for democratically based and binding transnational decision-making. While we might see the embryonic outlines of a global civil society (cf. Keane, 2003), its full realization is not on the horizon, even if the idea is a powerful and progressive element of the social imaginary. Yet even with national contexts, with a multiplicity of public spheres the risk grows that the orbit of many spheres may pass far from the processes of political decision-making.

In terms of the structural dimension, public spheres online are also shaped by their interfaces with offline institutions and by the particular functions of these institutions. This perspective also helps us to understand the dispersed character of public spheres. Thus, we can schematically specify a number of different sectors to net-based public spheres, including:

- Versions of *e-government*, usually with a top-down character, where government representatives interact with citizens, and where information about governmental administration and services is made available. While interaction may be relatively constricted, it can still at times serve as a sector of the public sphere. This sector is sometimes distinguished from *e-governance*, which emphasises horizontal civic communication with the emphasis on input for government policy (Malina, 2003);
- the *advocacy/activist domain*, where discussion is framed by organisations with generally shared perceptions, values and goals – and geared for forms of political intervention. These include both traditional parliamentary politics, established corporate and other organized interest group politics (e.g., unions), as well as the new politics of social movements and other activists;
- the vast array of diverse *civic forums* where views are exchanged among citizens and deliberation can take place. This is generally understood as the paradigmatic version of the public sphere on the net, but it would be quite erroneous to neglect the others;
- the pre- or *para-political domain*, which airs social and cultural topics having to do with common interests and/or collective identities. Here politics is not explicit, but always remains a potential. Clearly there is no absolute way in which the boundary between the non- and the para-political can be drawn, since it is always in part discursively negotiated and changeable;
- the *journalism domain*, which includes everything from major news organizations that have gone online such as newspapers and CNN to net-based news organisations (usually without much or any own original reporting) such as Yahoo! News, to alternative news organisations such as Indymedia and Mediachannel, as well as one-person weblogs sites (also known as 'bloggers'). Interestingly, the research literature has tended to focus mainly on deliberative interaction in terms of online public spheres,

and/or mass media journalism. We should not forget that the journalism sector online is a core element of the public sphere on the internet.

This list can of course be made more elaborate; for example, one could divide civic forums into those which originate from journalistic initiatives from those with other origins. The point is simply to highlight the sprawling character of the multi-sector online public sphere. It contributes to the destabilisation of the systems of political communication, and creates certain kinds of practical difficulties for the functioning of democracies. At the same time, as noted, there is another side, a positive one that can offer openings for new developments, particularly in the realm of extra-parliamentarian politics.

Two perspectives

Two contending perspectives seem to be emerging in regard to the role of internet in the public sphere. One view posits that while there have been some interesting changes for the way democracy works, on the whole, the import of the internet is modest; the net is not deemed yet to be a factor of transformation. Margolis and Resnick (2000:14) conclude that 'There is an extensive political life on the Net, but it is mostly an extension of political life off the Net'. So while the major political actors may engage in online campaigning, lobbying, policy advocacy, organising, and so forth, this perspective underscores that there does not seem to be any major political change in sight. The argument is that internet has not made much of a difference in the ideological political landscape, it has not helped mobilize more citizens to participate, nor has it altered the ways that politics gets done. Even the consequences of modest experiments to formally incorporate internet into the political system with 'e-democracy' have not been overwhelming (cf. Clift, 2003). E-government efforts to incorporate citizens into discussions and policy formulations usually have a decisive top-down character (cf. Malina, 2003, for a discussion of the UK circumstances), with discursive constraints that deriving from the elite control of the contexts.

This evidence cannot be lightly dismissed, but what should be emphasized is that this perspective is anchored in sets of assumptions that largely do not see beyond the formal political system, and the traditional role of the media in that system. Indeed, much of the evidence is based on electoral politics, in the U.S.

(cf. the collections by Jenkins and Thornburn, 2003, and Anderson and Cornfield, 2003). While the problems of democracy are acknowledged, the view is that the solutions lie in revitalizing the traditional models of political participation and patterns of political communication.

Other scholars alternatively take as their point of departure the understanding that we are moving into a new, transitional era in which the certitudes of the past in regard to how democracy works have become problematic. Democracy is seen to be, precariously, at a new historical juncture. Few observers would dismiss the central importance of electoral politics: a more robust democracy will not emerge by blithely side-stepping traditional, formal structures and procedures. However, one phenomenon that challenges the certitudes of the traditionalist view is the massive growth in what we can call advocacy or issue politics, often in the form of ongoing campaigns. Some of the advocates are large and powerful interest groups, others take the form of social movements or have a more grass roots character. Many represent versions of 'new' politics (called 'life politics' by Giddens, 1991; 'sub-politics' by Beck, 1997; Bennett, 2003b, speaks of 'lifestyle' politics); such politics can materialize all over the social terrain, and manifest itself in many contexts, including popular culture.

This 'infinite' view of politics increasingly in confrontation with the more traditional 'bounded' notion, to use the terms of Blumler and Gurevitch (2000). Common for most is that electoral politics is often sidestepped, signalling a growing bifurcation between traditional parties and single-issue advocacy groups. There is not that much research available yet on these new forms of engagement, but initial findings suggest a variety of different organisational forms, usually very loose and horizontal in character, with fluid memberships (cf. Bennett, 2003a; Cammaerts and van Audenhove, 2003). This suggests a very different kind of organisational structure, as well as view of membership, compared to traditional parties.

It is often commented that the ostensible political apathy and disaffiliation from the established political system for many citizens may not necessarily signal a disinterest in politics per se. Rather, many citizens have refocused their political attention outside the parliamentary system. Or they are in the process of redefining just what constitutes the political, often within the context of social movements. Among such groups, the boundaries between politics, cultural values,

identity processes and local self-reliance measures become fluid (Beck, 1997). Politics becomes not only an instrumental activity for achieving concrete goals, but also a performative and expressive activity, a way of asserting group values, ideals and belonging in public spaces.

In the arena of new politics the internet become not only relevant, but central: it is especially the capacity for the 'horizontal communication' of civic interaction that is paramount. Both technologically and economically, access to the Net (and other new technologies, such as mobile phones) has helped facilitate the growth of large digital networks of activists. At present, it is in the tension-filled crevices deriving from the changes in the media industries, in socio-cultural patterns, and in modes of political engagement that we can begin to glimpse new public sphere trends where the internet clearly makes a difference. In their recent survey of the available research from political science, Graber et. al. (2002:3-4) note '...the literature on interest networks and global activism seems particularly rich in examples of how various uses of the Internet and the Web have transformed activism, political pressure, and public communication strategies....Research on civic organizations and political mobilization is characterized by findings showing potentially large effects of new media and for the breadth of directly applicable theory'. Set in relation to the population as a whole, the numbers involved here may not seem overwhelming, but the embryonic patterns taking shape in the public sphere now may with historical hindsight in the future prove to have been quite significant.

Interaction: limits of deliberative democracy

In the discussions about democracy and the public sphere in recent years, the theme of deliberative democracy is often aired. In the final sections of this presentation I wish to address this topic by looking at some findings from recent research on online forums, as well as considering the concept itself. In particular, I see limitations in the notion of deliberative democracy as an analytic horizon for understanding the democratic impact of political discussion in online public spheres. While useful, my view is that this notion only takes us part of the way in analysing and understanding political discussion on the internet, especially if we

focus on new, extra-parliamentarian politics. The rational biases of the deliberative democracy need to be complemented with what I call civic cultures.

Theories of democracy have generally posited that the communicative interaction among citizens is of prime importance. Indeed, talk among citizens is seen as fundamental to – and an expression of – their participation. Civic discussion is seen as constitutive of publics, which is both morally and functionally vital for democracy. The idea of deliberative democracy integrates elements of political theory with perspectives on communication (I develop these points in more detail in Dahlgren, 2002). The impact of Habermas and those working within his theoretical tradition have had a major impact in shaping the idea of deliberative democracy. The notion of deliberation points to the procedures of open discussion aimed at achieving rationally motivated consensus. Certainly dialogue is preferable to violence, and good dialogue is preferable to poor dialogue, but with the referent of the Habermasian ideal speech situation, demanding criteria are placed on the nature of political discussion. High standards are useful and necessary to define directions, even if we realise that reality often falls short of the ideals.

Not surprisingly, recent research has shown that online discussions do not always follow the high ideals set for deliberative democracy. Speech is not always so rational,, tolerance towards those who hold opposing views is at times wanting, and the forms of interaction are not always so civil (Wilhelm, 2000). Certainly political life offline can often be like that, so there is no particular reason to expect an ontological transformation merely because discussion shifts to cyberspace. So an inventory of shortcomings emerges in the research. Hagemann (2002) finds in his analysis of political party discussion lists in the Netherlands that participation is skewed towards a small number of frequent participants. Moreover, the communicative rationality of the contributions was not impressive, in that they were often typified by the assertion of opinion without supporting arguments. Fung (2003) noticed that in the Hong Kong situation, journalists might sometimes debate under the false guise of ordinary citizens.

Aside from such ethical failures, there are also sociological shortcomings in regard to deliberative democracy, the most basic being the familiar low level of participation, awareness of which in turn seems to further reduce the motivation to engage via the net (Schultz, 2000; Heikkilä and Lehtonen, 2003). (It might be

useful, however, to reflect more on the theoretic issue that Schultz (2000) raises: while we bemoan low participation on the internet, what would the consequences of very high participation be like, given that attention is a scarce resource and with increasing participation, there is less time for participants to listen to each other? One could perhaps establish 'optimal' levels of participation in specific contexts based on discursive feasibility). In any case, there is also good news from this research. Tsaliki (2002) found a very satisfactory level of public deliberation in her comparative study of online forums in Greece, the Netherlands, and Britain. Also, the internet seems to offer opportunities to participate for many people who otherwise find that there are too many taboos and too much discomfiture in talking about politics in their own face-to-face environments (Stromer-Galley, 2002).

In regard to such aspects as these, the vision of deliberative democracy provides a useful compass for envisioning what enhanced online public spheres could be. Yet there is something problematic inherent in the discursive rationalism in Habermas' (1989) original position regarding the public sphere, and which is amplified by his later work on pragmatics and the ideal speech situation (Habermas 1984, 1987). Basically, what reduces the utility of the concept of deliberative democracy is its inability to take into account relations of power. Kohn (2000:409) approaches this issue by saying that '...reasonableness is itself a social construction which usually benefits those already in power....Democratic theory must consider how critical perspectives capable of challenging the dominant definition of rationality are generated, contested, and institutionalized'. While she underscores the important role that deliberative democracy has, she makes the point that it tends to privilege the modes of communication among the elites. She argues that historically, the expansion of the democratic character of society has been prompted by mobilization, the generation of collective identities, and concerted action, not by the attainment of theoretical consensus.

Arguing in a parallel, if a bit more abstract manner, Mouffe (1999) makes the case that the political is an irreducible dimension of all social relations, and that conflict – she uses the term antagonism – is always present in the ever-shifting relations between various interests, between changing groupings of 'us' and 'them' in plural societies. The task is not to strive for consensus, which is ultimately temporary and in any case always predicated on power, nor to eradicate power from democratic politics, but rather to formulate forms of power that are in

keeping with democratic values and a democratic system. Instead of trying to remove passions from politics, replacing them with rational consensus, the aim should be to 'mobilize those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs' (Mouffe, 1999: 756). While she does not have so much to say about the specifics of political discussion, she too is advocating a perspective that sees the vision of Habermasian deliberative democracy suppresses the reality of power relations to the disadvantage of those with the least power.

These critical reflections can be linked to the point noted above that the internet has a more compelling role to play in the advocacy/activist sector of the online public sphere, in the context of new extra-parliamentarian politics. While intra-organisational political discussion strives for internal consensus (or at least compromise), it is also attempting to generate collective identity and at times promote mobilisation. The thrust of their political address towards power holders in the political or economic realm is not to attain consensus, but rather to impact on policy. Towards political society at large it seeks to stimulate public opinion. Those working in the alter-globalisation movement, as well as those in, for instance, environmental, human rights, feminist and peace organizations, strive to make a political difference in settings that are characterized by a highly unequal relations of power. While rational consensus may at times be a suitable strategy, deliberation is not the best overall frame for describing or analysing the political interaction that takes place.

Civic cultures and political discussion

As a complementary way to analyse and understand political interaction in online public spheres, I propose that we treat political discussion not just in terms of its rational communicative qualities, but also as a form of practice integrated within more encompassing civic cultures. I have been developing the notion of civic culture (Dahlgren, 2003, 2000a, 2000b) as a way to conceptualise the factors that can enhance or impede political participation – the enactment of citizenship understood as forms of social agency. Space only permits a brief overview here, and then I will return to the question of political discussion, framing it as part of civic cultures.

The idea of civic culture takes as its starting point the notion of citizens as social agents, and it asks what are the *cultural* factors behind such agency (or its absence). Civic cultures point to both the conditions and the manifestations of such participation. They are anchored in the minds sets and symbolic milieu of everyday life.

Civic cultures are potentially both strong and vulnerable: they help to promote the functioning of democracy, they can serve to empower or disempower citizens, yet like all culture, they can easily be affected by political and economic power. A key assumption here is that a viable democracy must meet certain conditions at the level of lived experiences, personal resources and subjective dispositions. The notion of civic cultures grafts some fruitful elements from cultural theory onto some more familiar themes from political communication. This highlights that such dimensions as meaning, identity and subjectivity are important elements of political communication.

We can point to public spheres, to their representations and possible forms of interaction, yet questions about why people participate in them or not remain. The framework of civic cultures seeks to address these questions, and provide empirical starting points for analysis. Given that the foundation of the civic culture frame is the citizen-agent, this frame is thus interested in the processes of becoming – how people develop into citizens, how they come to see themselves as members and potential participants in societal development. Civic culture is an analytic construct that seeks to identify the possibilities of people acting in the role of citizens. This is a role which can have non- or pre-political aspects, but which may develop toward politics, and indeed evolve into formalized politics. The key here is to underscore the processual and contextual dimension: the political and politics are not simply given, but are constructed via word and deed.

The civic culture concept does not presuppose homogeneity among its citizens; it in fact assumes that there are many ways in which citizenship and democracy can be enacted. It does, however, suggest the need for minimal shared commitments to the vision and procedures of democracy, which in turn entails a capacity to see beyond the immediate interests of one's own group and its interests. Needless to say, this is a challenging balance to maintain. However, different social and cultural groups can express civic culture in different ways, theoretically enhancing democracy's possibilities. To facilitate the use of this

materialist and constructionist concept, I treat it as comprising five dynamically inter-related parameters: values, affinity, knowledge, identities, and practices.

Values: It should be underscored that values must have their anchoring in everyday life; a political system will never achieve a democratic character if the world of the everyday reflects anti-democratic normative dispositions.

Affinit: This points to a minimal sense of commonality among citizens in heterogeneous late modern societies, a sense that they belong to the same social and political entities, despite all other differences. They have to deal with each other to make their common entities work, whether at the level of neighbourhood, nation state or the global arena. This commonality is grounded in a realization among all groups of the mutual need to maintain democracy and adhere to its rules.

Knowledge: *Referential cognizance of the world is indispensable for the life of democracy. A subset of knowledge is competencies, and in particular, the skills to deal communicatively in the socio-political world are essential, which points to some degree of literacy and the relevance of education for democracy. Modes of knowledge are evolving, however, especially among the young, in keeping with cultural changes and new media technologies that can promote new modalities of thought and expression, new ways of knowing and forms of communicative competencies.*

Identities: Citizenship is a formal status, with rights and obligations and it has its social conditions. However, it also has a subjective side: people must be able to see themselves as members and potential participants with efficacy in social and political entities; this must be a part of people's multidimensional identities. Citizenship is central to the issues of social belonging and social participation. Identities of membership are not just subjectively produced by individuals, but evolve in relation to social milieus and institutional mechanisms.

Practices: Democracy must be enacted in concrete, recurring practices – individual, group, and collective – relevant for diverse situations. Such practices help generate personal and social meaning to the ideals of democracy. They must have some element of the routine, of the taken for granted about them (e.g., elections), if they are to be a part of a civic culture, yet the potential for spontaneous interventions, one-off, novel forms of practice, needs to be kept

alive. Civic cultures require many other practices, pertinent to many other circumstances in everyday life. Across time, practices become traditions, and experience becomes collective memory. Today's democracy needs to be able to refer to a past, without being locked in it. New practices and traditions can and must evolve to ensure that democracy does not stagnate.

The most fundamental and most ubiquitous practice is precisely discussion. Discussion has a 'meta'-quality about it, in that it is through talk that much of the substance of the other parameters becomes actualised, circulated, and reinforced. Interaction is one of the dimensions of the public sphere, and as I noted, one can empirically investigate civic discussion by examining, for instance, its various discursive modes, its spatial and contextual sites and settings, its social circumstances.

From this vantage point, discussion in the context of the extra-parliamentarian new politics within the advocacy/activist domain of online public spheres can be seen in a different light. In the context of destabilised political communication systems, the discussions generated in these settings by these actors hold out the modest potential for making a contribution to the renewal, growth, and strengthening of civic cultures among many citizens who feel distanced from the arenas of formal party politics. This view must of course be nuanced. For example, there are a wide variety of political colours in this sector, and not all of them may be considered democratic and progressive. Also, we are talking about relatively small numbers of seriously engaged citizens. The general situation here can be compared with the protest movements of the 1960's and 1970's, where rather small but determined groups could make significant impact on the political agendas. One of the differences is that today the groups are generally much more sophisticated and effective, not least thanks to their access to the new media and their skills with them.

Discussion here may or may not always take the form of Habermasian deliberation, but what is more important is the reciprocal dynamics that it generates among the parameters of civic culture and the impact this may have on the larger political situation. The values and commitments espoused by these groups are largely very democratic, and can be seen as a counter to some of the very undemocratic values associated with the prevailing neoliberal order. They are able to diffuse their knowledge through the net to each other, and on occasion

their efforts are picked up by journalists on the net or in the traditional mass media and become disseminated further to wider publics (Bennett, 2003a). The affinities demonstrated by many of these groups foster a spirit of cooperation between various organisations and their loosely defined memberships, contributing to the formation of a broader counter political culture (Cammaerts van Audenhove, 2003). Via the identities that are developed by participation, people are exploring new ways of being citizens and doing politics. Among the other notable practices are the sharing of information and experience, often transnationally, maintaining permanent campaigns to try to impact on public opinion on particular issues, and in some cases organising political (anti-)consumption, i.e. boycotts, which can serve to concretely link up the politically abstract with people's everyday lives.

These parameters reciprocally reinforce each other. Thus discussion is a practice that enhances knowledge and competencies, which are being shared and spread through activist networks. The activist networking continually reiterates core democratic values, which in turn support the civic affinity and identities needed to participate in network-based politics. These in turn become embodied in the various practices associated with the movements: organizational, communicative, political. These practices in turn serve to solidify identities, values, and affinities.

While it is important to keep a clear perspective and not exaggerate the extent of the activities or their impact, it would also be foolish to underestimate what seems to be a major development in the contemporary history of Western democracy. The internet is at the forefront of the evolving public sphere, and if the dispersion of public spheres generally is contributing to the already destabilised political communication system, specific counter public spheres on the internet are also allowing engaged citizens to play a role in the development of new democratic politics. Discussion here may take the form of deliberation, with various degrees of success, but what is more important in this context is that talk among citizens is the catalyst for the civic cultures that are fuelling this engagement. The jury is still out on what the verdict will be regarding the impact of these developments on the larger democratic systems, and I suspect that the jury will continue to be out for quite some time.

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Pirateri – en social bevægelse i netværkssamfundet?¹

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På trods af, at der igennem populærmusikhistorien, mest tydeligt i relation til det Afro-amerikanske, har været forskellige identitetsrelaterede "oppositioner" imod musikindustrien, har der dog ofte også været tale om en "klassisk" anti-kapitalisme, der går på tværs af nationale, religiøse og etniske skel og altså ikke oppositioner funderet i "primære" identitetsmarkører såsom race, køn eller sted. Hvis vi vender os imod de identitetsdannelser, der er relateret til de alternative musikudvekslings- og distributionspraksisser (pirateri), der som følge af musikkens delvise "løsrivelse" fra de traditionelle distributionsartefakter foregår over internettet ved hjælp af diverse applikationer: Gnutella, Kazaa, Limewire etc., er det i høj grad også tvivlsomt, om disse kan relateres til "primære" identitetsdannelser. Men hvorledes relaterer disse praksisser sig så til Manuel Castells' forestillinger om betydende sociale bevægelser i netværkssamfundet?

I Castells' definition af "social movements" lægges der vægt på det transformative, samtidig med at definitionen er forholdsvis inkluderende med hensyn til identitetsspørgsmålet. Castells definerer således sociale bevægelser som "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society".² Det følger heraf, at de værdier, som den sociale bevægelse repræsenterer, står i et eller andet modsætningsforhold til normen, og at bevægelsen er målbevidst og kollektiv. Med hensyn til det oppositionelle kan man sige, at flere af de offentlige diskurser, hvor igennem de alternative distributionspraksisser har forsøgt at legitimeret sig, har været funderet på en grundopfattelse af industrien som stående imellem musikerne og forbrugerne, en profit-søgende og udsultende flaskehals, der forhindrer kreativitetens flow imellem udøvere og lyttere. En sådan opfattelse samt en formodning om, at dette har været gældende igennem længere tid, har således for

¹ Denne artikel er primært et uddrag af en længere og tidligere udgivet artikel: "Populærmusikken i (mellem) netværk: produktion, positioner og pirateri", *GRUS*, 24. årgang, nr. 69, 2003, s. 74-94. Som det antydes i titlen er denne artikel et forsøg på at forstå de gnidninger, der er opstået imellem musikindustrien og så alternative distributionspraksisser ud fra en netværksoptik, og som her primært defineres ud fra Manuel Castells' tre-bindts værk: *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); II) *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); og III) *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Det skal dog tilføjes at konklusionen i nærværende artikel er anderledes end i *GRUS*-artiklen.

² Castells 1997, *op.cit.*, s. 3.

mange retfærdiggjort en praksis, hvor man så at sige har "taget igen" fra en industri, der anklages for at have udnyttet både musikere og musikelskere. I tilgift har dele af de alternative distributionspraksisser, ud over at være reaktive (imod industriens oligopol), i en vis udstrækning også været proaktive, idet de — i hvert tilfælde i en idealistisk læsning — har proklameret en alternativ udvekslings- og distributionsmodel for allokering af kulturelle produkter (en bytte/gave/deleøkonomi over for en traditionel vareøkonomi). Man kan dog stille spørgsmålstegn ved, hvor udpræget både det oppositionelle og det proaktive aspekt har været, og i forlængelse deraf i hvilken udstrækning disse praksisser overhovedet har været refleksivt ("politisk") legitimerede og ikke blot praksisser, der — vel vidende, at det er ulovligt — bundet i omkostningsniveauet (i en bred forstand) og dermed måske primært har fungeret målbevidst i relation til egen vinding. "Graden" af refleksivitet/legitimitet vil imidlertid afhænge af, hvilke genrer/musikkulturer vi retter opmærksomheden imod, og er altså noget, der må afklares af empiriens vej.

I kølvandet på den omfattende "community"-diskussion har der dog været en udbredt — men ikke særligt reflekteret — tendens til at tale om MP3-fællesskaber. De forskellige udvekslingsfora, der eksisterer, er karakteriseret ved forskellige grader af fællesskab og kommunikation, men udvekslingspraksissen i sin mest rudimentære form er anonym. Selvom de fleste af disse applikationer har forskellige "chat"-faciliteter — muligheder for kommunikation uden om eller i relation til selve fil-udvekslingen — er det primært den ikke-kommunikativt støttede praksis, der her er genstand for refleksion og det ud fra en formodning om, at denne form er mindst lige så udbredt som de mere fællesskabsrelaterede (fan)-praksisser, der ofte har været diskuteret i relation til internettet.

Hvis praksis således ikke er legitimeret i relation til en kollektivt funderet diskurs, "rækker" det så til en social bevægelse — eller et fællesskab i en gængs forstand? Umiddelbart kan man svare, at selv individ-funderede legitimeringer — f.eks egen vinding — jo ofte bindes op på bredere kulturelle diskurser, og at dette ofte vil være tilfældet i udvekslingspraksisser, da de fleste aktører på et eller andet plan nok er bekendt med den omfangsrige medieomtale, dette fænomen har fået — blandt andet fokuseret på branchens reaktioner. Derudover peger den hastighed, hvormed antallet af napster-brugere steg, på en eller anden form for kommunikation, der ikke udelukkende er indirekte. En indikation af, hvorledes

disse processer har spillet ind i hinanden, kunne fås ved at sammenholde antallet af brugere af Napster med udviklingen og "graden" af medieomtale. Her må vi nøjes med at formode, at de alternative praksisser opnår en vis form for målbevidsthed, refleksivitet og kollektivitet igennem den ekstensive medieomtale, der dog ikke kan sammenlignes med den mediestrategi og kollektivitet, som Castells beskriver.

Denne type "bevægelse" (netværk) kan dog alligevel tænkes at have en bredere transformerende effekt og således i den forstand være en art social bevægelse på trods af dens manglende målbevidsthed og kollektivitet. Det skal i den sammenhæng nævnes, at flere af de "kulturer", som Castells ser som medvirkende i "etableringen" af netværkssamfundet — f.eks. "the virtual communitarians" (Rheingold m. fl.) — i en eller anden forstand vel også kan kaldes sociale bevægelser.³ Pierre Lévy går faktisk så vidt som at kalde fremkomsten af "cyberspace" resultatet af en "authentic social movement", der så at sige approprierede kommunikationsteknologien fra bureaukratiet.⁴ Selvom der i høj grad kan sættes spørgsmålstegn ved en sådan idealistisk læsning, er det dog en kilde til undren, at Castells ikke gør mere ud af at relatere disse "bevægelser", der i deres identitetsform er forankrede i netværkslogikken, til de nyere og mere eksplicit identitets-relaterede sociale bevægelser. Selvom Castells tillægger de forskellige politiske, sociale og ikke mindst kulturelle udviklinger i 60'erne stor betydning i udviklingen af netværkssamfundet, gøres der ikke så meget ud af det tilsyneladende paradoks, at disse udviklinger indeholder den kulturelle kim til både netværkssamfundets fremkomst og dets nutidige transformation. Det kan derfor undre, at Castells ser de nye betydende sociale bevægelser baseret på "an entirely distinct system of values and beliefs", altså "bevægelser", der enten fremkommer "udefra" eller vokser op i opposition, altså de forskellige, men spredte udtryk for en forstærkelse af den kollektive identitet over for netværkssamfundets individualisering.⁵ At de nye sociale bevægelser både benytter sig 60'er-relaterede medie-strategier og af den nyeste kommunikationsteknologi og således "are responding in kind to computerized globalisation", som det udtrykkes af Castells, er for ham kun vigtigt i den forstand, at dette både højner synligheden og

³ Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), specielt kap. 2.

⁴ Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), kap. 7.

⁵ Castells 1998, *op.cit.*, s. 351.

muliggør "networking, [a] decentered form of organisation and intervention".⁶ En sådan kulturel medie-baseret politik og organisationsform synes dog i lige så høj grad at pege på en mere "klassisk" løbebane hen imod en inklusion og derved netværkssamfundets udvidelse snarere end transformation.

For Castells er fokus på selve identitetsdannelsesprocessen — og den potentielle bevægelse fra reaktiv modstandsidentitet til proaktiv projektidentitet — dog begrundet i et (profetisk) ønske om at fremanalysere en række nye kollektiviteter, der vil transformere netværkssamfundet (en hældning, der måske til dels kan skyldes hans "forankring" i den amerikanske identitetspolitik med dens fokus på de kollektive og forankrende aspekter af identitetsdannelsen). Det er dog højst tvivlsomt, om en sådan optik kan indfange de mere "interne" netværks-"bevægelser", der snarere skal forstås som konstituerede igennem bevægelser, altså som konstitueret af noget, der (konstant) bevæger sig snarere end et produkt af noget "forankret". For at forstå disse "interne" bevægelser må vi således vende tilbage til en mere detaljeret beskrivelse af netværkssamfundets centrale logikker: "flows", "space" og "space of flows".

Castells definerer "flows" som "repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjoined positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society". I forbindelse hermed ses begrebet om rum ("space") som "the material support" for sådanne udvekslingspraksisser, og "the space of flows" er således netværkssamfundets (socio-materielle) infrastruktur, der som oftest er markedsrelateret, idet denne er "the spatial logic of the dominant interests/functions in our society"; det er i kraft af denne infrastruktur, at netværk — forstået som "set[s] of interconnected nodes" — kan fungere.⁷ Hvad disse "nodes" er, afhænger af netværkets karakter, men eftersom Castells fokuserer på sociale relationer, hænger netværkificeringen i høj grad også sammen med en stigende individualisering, der igen hænger sammen med, at flere og flere sociale relationer får karakter af forbrugsforhold (blandt andet i relation til staten, samtidig med at denne nedtoner sin regulative rolle i forhold til det øvrige marked). Det er i forlængelse af denne individualisering

⁶ Castells 1997, *op.cit.*, s. 2 & s. 362.

⁷ Castells 1996, *op.cit.*, s. 470. De to foregående citater er fra samme bind på side 415 og 412. Det er hos Castells ind mellem uklart om netværksbegrebet refererer til sociale relationer/organisationer eller den materielle infrastruktur, der gør disse relationer mulige, og i forlængelse deraf er det til dels også uklart, hvorledes disse "lag" (netværk) tænkes at relatere sig til hinanden.

og forbrugerisme, at Castells ser de betydende identitetsdannelser op imod "the process of techno-economic globalization".⁸

De nye distributionspraksisser, som kort blev introduceret ovenfor, ser netop ud til at kunne karakteriseres som sådanne "flows" — "repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjoined positions" — i den kommunikative infrastruktur, som Castells netop ser som et (det vigtigste) understøttende "lag" under "the space of flows". (D)et andet "lag", der "forankrer" sådanne flows, er "nodes and hubs", altså de "service"-punkter, der gør, at "the flows" glider tilfredsstillende; i de praksisser, vi her kigger på vil dette være de forskellige udbydere af det software, der gør den decentrale udveksling mulig (altså det "punkt", der f.eks. gør applikationen Kazaa tilgængelig samt vedligeholder den). Det sidste "lag", Castells påpeger under "the space of flows", er knyttet til "the technocratic-financial-managerial elite", der udøver de betydende funktioner, omkring eller i kraft af hvilke et globalt "rum" manifesteres. Castells påpeger således igen og igen på, at dette rum, der artikuleres via bevægelser, dette "space of flows", er kommet i stand på baggrund af "the spatial logic of the dominant interests/functions in our society".⁹ Den elite, som Castells taler om, er således centralt placeret i det abstrakte Net, imod hvilket de (nye) sociale bevægelser reagerer; i forlængelse deraf siger Castells — i et argument, der minder om en blanding af Benjamin R. Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995) og Christopher Laschs *The Revolt of the Elites* (1995) — at "elites are cosmopolitan, people are local".¹⁰

Mens de to første "fundamenter", infrastrukturen og (dermed) "hubs" og "nodes" så at sige "kvalificerer" de alternative praksisser til at være et "flow" i Castells' forstand, så kan disse vel næppe i deres egenskab af forholdsvist perifert placerede lovbydere – siges at være en konstituerende del af det dominerende "space of flows"? Omvendt, sammenlignet med en række strukturelt afkoblede befolkningsgrupper vil de fleste brugere af de alternative

⁸ Castells 1997, *op.cit.*, s. 3. Selvom disse antagelser ikke eksplicit er funderet i marxistisk teori, er der dog flere berøringsflader med dennes antagelser omkring det kapitalistiske system som strukturerede udvekslinger over større og større afstande samtidig med fremkomsten af forskellige typer af fremmedgørelse. En af forskellene ligger dog i, at kapitalen i Castells' og andres analyser "løsrives" og konvergerer, samtidig med at arbejdskraften (både) disintegrerer og mister sin relative betydning.

⁹ Castells 1997, *op.cit.*, s. 417.

¹⁰ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites — and the betrayal of democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

musikdistributionskanaler være en del af netværkssamfundets dominerende logikker. I tilgift hertil kunne man argumentere for, at den "opposition", som de alternative praksisser udgør, kun er overfladiske (interne) krusninger inden for den kommende elite (da denne praksis er meget udbredt i uddannelsesmiljøer med let adgang til teknologien), og at efterhånden, som lovbryderne stiger i hierarkiet samtidig med at industrien kommer ud af sit teknologiske underskud, vil de ikke-kommercielle udvekslinger blot (for)blive et relativt harmløst supplement til et profitabelt globalt musikmarked. Samtidig er der en række træk ved (primært unge) musikforbrugere, der minder om de karakteristika, som Castells fremhæver hos eliten. Dels er megen populærmusik international og/eller global og i den forstand (ofte) karakteriseret ved den "cultural indefinition" — og dermed ahistoriske identitetsdannelse — som Castells hæfter på den kosmopolitiske elite og dens materielle manifestationer. På forbrugssiden har dette ofte været kædet sammen med nogle publikumskonstellationer, "cultural spaces", der går på tværs af regionale og nationale skel, og derved på sin vis været en del af "the space of flows". Det er således ikke helt klart, hvem "people" refererer til i Castells grove dikotomi — og hvad der skal til for at tilhøre eliten. De alternative distributionspraksisser falder så sige igennem Castells' optik, idet de tilsyneladende befinder sig midt imellem "the space of flows" og så nyere sociale bevægelser (men kan ikke "reduces" til nogle af delene). Dette skyldes til dels, at netop relationen imellem disse to "processer" er underteoretiseret hos Castells. Men, hvorom alting er, så er der tilsyneladende en række vigtige praksisser i netværkssamfundet, der falder uden for den dikotomisk-funderede "teleologi", som (til dels) styrer Castells' analyse af de nye tider.

Man kunne dog indvende at den egentlige grund til at Castells dikotomi tilsyneladende ikke indfanger de alternative distributionspraksisser kunne være at disse i og for sig ikke står i opposition til netværkssamfundet og dens logik men snarere skal ses som en slags radikaliseret af denne. Den industri som disse praksisser vender sig imod er således kun til dels organiseret ud fra en netværkslogik. Set i det lys er de alternative distributionspraksisser ikke sociale bevægelser, der har potentiale til at transformere netværkssamfundet men snarere netværksdannelse der "udvider" og udspreder netværkslogikken — altså, netværkssamfundets fortrop snarere end dets modkultur. De

interrelaterede peer to peer praksisser er i udpræget grad individuelle, decentrale, distribuerede og åbne netværksdannelser i opposition til et pladeindustriens i stigende grad centraliserede distributionsnet. Man kan måske endog sige, at de decentraliserede distributionspraksisser — hvor hver enkelt bruger agerer distributør for andre — er et "naturligt" svar på en udvikling hen imod en generel decentralisering og individualisering (netværkificering), som det etablerede, kommercielle musik-"Net" ikke har kunnet levere inden for distributionen. Mens de kollektive identiteter, som Castells tillægger stor betydning, er formet i opposition til det store globale (vare- og magt)net — og derfor skaber betydning "without global, instrumental reference" — så forholder det sig anderledes med de alternative praksisser.¹¹ Disse må i høj grad anses for at være forankrede i en global "instrumentalisme" kombineret med en "radikal individualisme", der udspringer af den enkeltes mulighed — via en global "forbundethed" — for selv at sammensætte sin musik uafhængigt af de distributionskanaler og -formater og genrer, som industrien stiller til rådighed. Det er dog vigtigt at pointere, ud over den "sekundære" kollektivitet igennem medieomtalen, at udbyttet er direkte proportionalt med antallet af andre "individuelle" brugere, og at denne praksis således i en eller anden forstand er kollektiv. Selvom kollektiviteten ikke direkte er identitetsbundet (f. eks. i lokalitet eller etnisk tilhørsforhold), så er den succesfulde udvælgelse jo netop betinget af den samtidige tilstedeværelse af en anden (og andens) tændt(e) computer med det ønskede indhold. Dette er dog en anden form for kollektivitet end den, Castells beskæftiger sig med, om end denne "anden" type må siges at være utrolig vigtig i et netværksperspektiv, da vi netop her har forbundne (men ellers urelaterede) individer i en netværksdannelse, der dog ikke — ud over i den forstand, jeg allerede har påpeget — kan opfattes som formålsbevidste og kollektive.

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¹¹ Castells 1996, s. 25.

Media Convergence and the Future of Broadcast Media. Public Service in a Digital Media System

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Until recently most academic writing on digital television and its impact on public service broadcasting has been speculative and has mainly been a discussion of future scenarios and a critique of the plans and strategies launched by public authorities or by the public broadcasters themselves. The reason is that in most countries digitalisation has just started and is yet only at its very beginning. In Denmark this is obviously the case, since digital television is still a very marginal phenomenon only available through satellite or cable and with only few subscribers. However, years ago it was decided to establish a digital terrestrial distribution system, but due to political conflicts the project has been delayed. Recently it was decided to build a very limited version of a digital terrestrial distribution system. Only one multiplex will be available, which means that digital terrestrial television hardly will offer Danish viewers more channels than they can achieve today through the current analogue system. It seems to be the case that the Danish government have decided not to take any definite steps towards digitalisation, except from what is needed in order to keep the door open for future development.

Still it is difficult to say how fast digital terrestrial television will grow, and it is even difficult to say whether or not it is going to work in the way the legislators hope for. It mainly depends on the audiences' willingness to invest in set-top-boxes. The risk is that terrestrial digital television will fail to attract audiences, and that satellite and cable provision will turn out to be more successful. For the future of public service broadcasting this could be crucial, since they have a privileged position in the terrestrial net that they won't get in any other delivery system, be it cable or satellite.

I don't want to go any further in this topic. Instead I want to address some of the problems and opportunities that the ongoing process of digitalisation raises for public service broadcasting in Denmark in order to say something about how digitalisation likely is going to affect public service broadcasting. To make things

more simple I will primarily refer to DR, which is the license fee funded public broadcaster in Denmark, and the broadcaster that have been most innovative in introducing digital services.

Even though Danish viewers still mainly watch analogue television digitalisation has already taken place inside DR and have quite recently lead to significant organisational changes by which DR has prepared itself for the future. Part of the changes is the introduction of digital production equipment, from cameras to editing, which has lead to restructuring of programme production. Instead of a organisational structure in which radio and television is separated, and broadcast and programme production is integrated, as has been the case in most old public service institutions, a new organisation is established. Here broadcasting, that is channel editing and scheduling, is separated from programme production and the relationship these functions is organised as an internal market. Moreover, the former distinction between radio, television and on-line production is by recent reorganisations abolished. Programme production is thus regarded as a multi-media activity, whereas channel editing still depends on a distinction between radio, television and on-line service. In terms of production facilities and organisational structures DR seems to be well prepared for the digital age. This is, however, not the only reason for DR's reforms. It is also part of a process by which DR seeks to be more competitive on the market, as the digital strategies have functioned as tools for organisational reforms that otherwise would have been difficult to achieve. It has primarily helped to rationalise programme production and to achieve better channel control.

In current programming on DR different versions of convergence between radio, television and on-line have already occurred. Today many television programmes have web-pages, radio channels are streamed on the internet, and even interactive programmes have been launched combining analogue broadcasting with on-line communication be it on the web or through SMS'es. However, the full potential of this will not be released until a digital distribution system has been established. In some sense, then, on could say that DR has already taken its first steps into the digital age, but in this case the first step is most likely going to be the easiest to take.

What makes further steps more complicated is that it to a large extent depends on how the development in the commercial digital market will be. It is still too early to say much about it, as many different factors are at play. However, one can look at DR's own expectations in this regard as it is presented in different strategy papers, which also to some extent have influenced official reports on media convergence and policy initiatives. Recently many of DR's visions of its future role have been part of the EBU strategy work, since the general director of DR has been chair of the EBU Digital Strategy Group. The report "Broadcast with a Purpose" that came out of this work is probably the most updated version of this kind of scenario building and is for that reason quite illustrative of the problems that public service broadcasters expect to face in the future. One basic and very important assumption in the report is that the switch from analogue to digital distribution will definitely take place: "... as broadcasters we do know that our whole environment will eventually be digital, and that the question is not if the digital evolution will happen, but how and when it will take place".

Whereas the official Danish white paper on media convergence, *Convergence in the network society* (2001), describes a number of different scenarios for the future media landscape, both the EBU strategy paper and DR's own strategy plans deal with only one scenario. What is expected is first of all a technological change that will lead to market environment changes, where huge international media conglomerates will play an important role and be able to function as gatekeepers in order to control complete media chains, from talent and rights to receiving equipment. Moreover, consumer behaviour is expected to change too and become more individualised resulting in audience fragmentation, as one of the most obvious consequences of digital distribution will be an increase in the number of available television channels in the first place, and in a longer perspective perhaps an on-demand based delivery system. Also funding is supposed to change as Pay-TV will expand and is expected to be the norm of future funding for broadcast services.

What is at risk here is the prospect of public service broadcasting being "relegated to simply providing television services for those who cannot afford Pay TV", and that public service broadcasters will be excluded from the digital world. Whether or not the scenario for pay TV are realistic or not is hard to say. It is, however, one of

the perhaps most crucial developments within digital distribution systems, and in my opinion it is important to take the consequences of such a development seriously. Digital television and multimedia are communication means that could extend the value of public service provision, since it makes possible more diversity, more choice and interactivity, that will be of benefit for the users and help to make it easier to serve minority interests, but at the same time new digital provision systems could as easily lead to an order, in which most television services will be based on direct payment.

What makes the scenario of free television transformed into pay-TV realistic is the fact that digital television is mainly, if not exclusively market driven. In this respect digitalisation doesn't represent something completely new, but is, as Jeanette Steemers (1998) points out, more like an extension of tendencies that have been evident since deregulation started at the beginning at the 1980ties. In Denmark many of the features related to digital television are already present today. The number of television channels have increased from one to eight within few years, some of them being tailored to specific audiences, and even though pay TV hasn't been successful yet most of the new channels available to Danish viewers are funded by subscription and are so called low-pay channels. This development has already to some extent lead to the kind of audience fragmentation that will increase in a fully digital system.

So far, the public service broadcasters have participated in this transformation of the television landscape, in Denmark successfully, since the two public broadcasters still are in a very strong market position, but in the future it might be a much more difficult task. Particularly in small countries like Denmark one of the biggest obstacles will be the limitations in funding. DR's strategy is to be present on every platform, to launch new channels, develop interactive services that add more value to programming. Clearly, it is a indeed very expansive strategy that will be difficult to realize financially, since there are absolutely no reason to believe that license fees will increase as much as needed. Competition only makes it more expensive to buy and produce attractive programmes and probably public broadcasters in the long run cannot afford the most attractive programmes, that will exclusively be offered on pay-TV. In regard to funding it is important to notice that much of the strategy work done in DR as well as within the EBU is inspired by

the BBC and its early paper on digitalisation *Extending Choice in a Digital Age* (1996). For obvious reasons it is a paper that reflects the position and needs of the BBC – which compared to most of the European public service broadcasters is a very powerful institution. Operation on a small market DR doesn't have such a strong position and it might be wiser for DR as for many other small public broadcasters to think in a less ambitious way than the BBC.

Due to the financial constraints one of the perhaps most crucial tasks for public service broadcasters, not at least for DR, will be to choose which areas they want to go for. Otherwise there will be a risk of being everywhere, but only as a very small player without any chance of playing a meaningful role. A very important element in taking the right decisions is to take into account which services are relevant for a public service provider. Not all kinds of multi media services will be relevant some of them will probably be irrelevant for public purposes or even harmful to their mission, even though it would be possible for public service media to get a substantial market share. The problem is that public service broadcasters simply have too many options for expansion.

There are, however, not just economical reasons for public broadcasters to make choices. One of them is that in extending the concept of public service too far there is a risk that it loses its meaning and will turn out to be useless. Not all digital services deserve to be labelled as "public services". Two very different tendencies point in that direction: One of them is the idea that public service concept can be used as a kind of super concept for all kinds of non-commercial activities, be it public libraries, public education or publicly funded art. The problem is that public service becomes a synonym for all which is regarded as valuable in non-economic terms that is a kind of merit goods. By making this inclusion it becomes difficult to maintain the fundamental idea about public service as a concept intimately related to a specific kind of communication system. Moreover, a too broad definition of public service can easily lead to the very opposite, namely to a narrow understanding of what public service broadcasting should be, that is the notion of public service as everything that the market cannot provide.

The other tendency that threatens the concept of public service broadcasting is the blurring of the distinction between public and commercial media sector. What I have in mind is not only that public service programming becomes too similar to the programmes that commercial channels offer and that public service broadcasters produce programmes in the same way as commercial broadcasters do, but also the co-operation between public and private companies that by DR is regarded as necessary if public service broadcasters should be able to play a substantial role in multimedia production and in order to avoid being excluded by the commercial gatekeepers. What makes co-operation and joint ventures risky is that it could easily lead to a loss of identity and erode the distinctiveness of public service broadcasting. It is difficult to come up with a solution to that dilemma, but it is one that has to be taken seriously, as the pressure on resources increases.

So far, my argument about the problems facing public service broadcasting has been based on considerations on technology and market changes that force public service broadcasters to make relevant choices. I will like to end up by pointing to yet another challenge, which perhaps is the most urgent at the moment. This is the pressure from commercial actors not in terms of rating games, but in terms of lobbying for a new definition of what public service broadcasting should be. As competition grows harder, and public service broadcasters expand into new areas such as on-line services the private media industry begin to accuse public service broadcasters for unfair competition. One of the effects of this political pressure – formulated today in the EU – is that public service broadcasters have to define their role much more precise than before. It is not evident that they will be able to uphold the relatively broad mandate they have today and be able to provide popular programming in the amount needed to appeal to a mass audience. The political will to redefine public service broadcasting to include only the kind of programming that the market cannot provide seems to grow stronger these years.

It is not my task to find solutions to the dilemmas facing public service broadcasting in the digital age, but I think an important task for public broadcasting still will be to keep the right balance, being popular but yet distinctive. With the risk of being regarded as conservative I think that public service broadcasting should try as much as possible to maintain the fundamental qualities of broadcasting. I don't think that there is any reason to believe that the

social and cultural role of broadcasting will be less important in a digital media world than it has been before. Even if television viewing becomes more fragmented, as most observers suppose, there will still be room for broadcasting.

Though digital technology will make multimedia provision possible it doesn't necessarily change the character of broadcasting in the amount presumed by DR and EBU, but should perhaps rather be regarded as an *extension of broadcasting*. Public service broadcasters will be able to develop a communication system, in which broadcast and multimedia are connected to each other in ways that are relevant to the users. In such a network broadcasting has, however, to be the basic service, that gives access to the other media services, because broadcasting, as a public good, contains a social dimension, that is not part of any multimedia product, but which is a vital part of a public service.

It is, of course, difficult to say anything specific about how broadcasting will look like in the future. It seems nevertheless clear that new kinds of broadcast programming will be developed, if much of the current programmes will be left to pay TV. My guess will be that we will witness a kind revival of programme formats that fits to the nature of broadcasting, that is live programmes, whereas "canned" programmes" such as movies and serials will be mainly a business for pay TV and video-on-demand services. The point to be made is that broadcasting will be confined to the kinds of programming that only broadcasting can provide stressing its public character that seems to be still more important, as media use becomes more and more individualised (Tracey 1998). As Paddy Scannell has put it, "equal access for all to a wide and varied range of common informational, entertainment and cultural services, carries on channels that can be received throughout the country, should be regarded as an important citizen right in mass democratic societies. It is a crucial means – perhaps the only means at present – whereby common knowledges and pleasures in a shared public life are maintained as a social good for the whole population" (Scannell 1989: 136). Much in the same line John Ellis concludes that "broadcast television will continue as a distinctive form of television. (...) Broadcast television connects with the private and the disconnected moments of individuals, with diffuse feelings of escape and distractions from the

adventures of modern consumerism and life in the company of other consumers”
(Ellis 2000: 176).

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The Internet and Local Communities

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This paper examines different aspects of ICT in relation to local communities. Communities are understood here as political communities involving various local public spheres and channels of political communication. A model of these relations is presented in the first section of this paper, together with arguments for why it is relevant to focus on the local public sphere, from what perspective it is relevant, and why we should examine ICT in this connection. In the next three sections, a few selected local-government initiatives to create virtual public spheres are presented followed by a preliminary attempt to assess the added democratic value of these initiatives. Finally, the paper presents reflections pertaining to the relatively low priority granted to e-democracy on the public agenda.

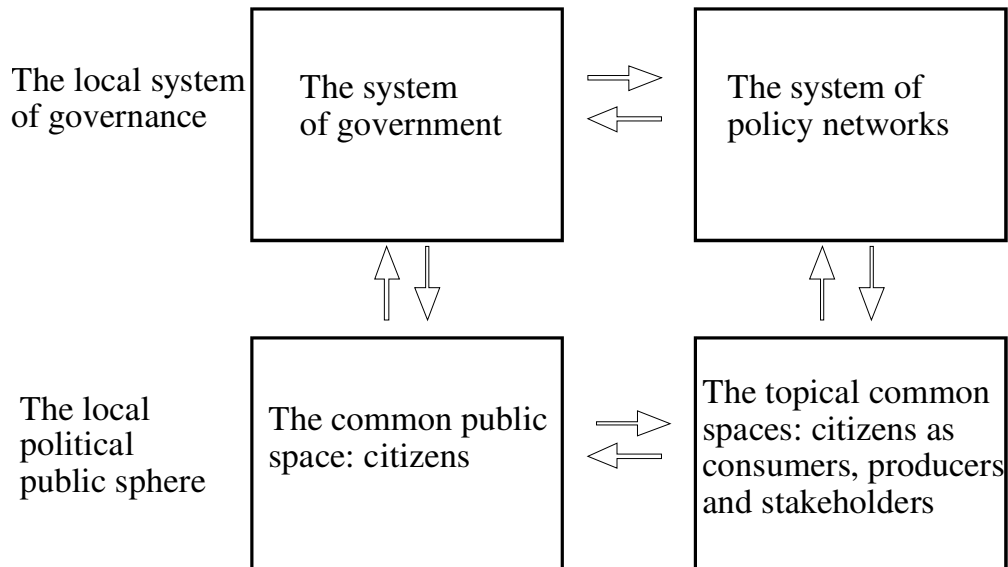
ICT, political communities and deliberative democracy

A political community is not a community in normal sociological terms: it is neither culturally based nor does it necessarily provide its members with a common sense of belonging or social identity. As I define a political community it is characterised by shared activities requiring common decision-making and implementation. Such activities take place at different levels: from small groups and associations to entire municipalities and nation states.

Local political communities are therefore overlapping. Only one community includes all citizens within the area, namely the municipality.

For analytical reasons *the* local political community is divided into two main units between which further distinction is made.

The local political community



These units are "the local system of governance" and "the local political public sphere". Within the local system of governance, one can distinguish between "the system of government" and "the system of policy networks". The system of government includes the relations between the elected council and the various administrative units, as it appears in local constitutional rule. A system of policy networks is found next to this formalised chain of government, the system of policy networks not being formalised to the same degree. It cuts across various political and administrative units as well as the formal boundaries of local government. It thereby involves different stakeholders in the surroundings, including private business, other institutions, voluntary associations and citizen-consumers, i.e. citizens in their roles as clients or as recipients of various kinds of public services. The system of policy networks has undoubtedly been growing in recent years; however, there is still much government in Danish municipalities.

The local political public sphere can be divided into two spaces: "the common public space" and "the topical common spaces", i.e. there are many public spheres, not merely one. The common public space includes all individuals within a geographically defined area in their roles as citizens with civil, political and social rights. Some relations in this area continue to be face-to-face political relations,

but most of the relations are mediated, of course. Furthermore, we should not see the common public space as a concrete place where all citizens meet. In modern societies common public spaces are divided into a myriad of partly separated and partly overlapping systems of political relations. Around 70 percent of the Danish population participates in local elections every fourth year and around 60 percent discusses local political issues "often or now and then". Considerable less read a daily local newspaper. Different activities are thus performed in different sub-spheres involving different people at different times.

The topical common spaces include relations between citizens in their roles as consumers, producers and stakeholders in various fields. Among the topical common spaces we find voluntary associations, interest groups and organised local communities. Face-to-face interaction is more frequent and less mediated in these spaces.

There are reciprocal relations between all four communities. In the following I will concentrate on the relations in the common public space, only making modest remarks about the relations in the topical common spaces. The overall question concerns the role of ICT for these relations.

But why focus at all on the local political public sphere? And why examine ICT in this connection? If ICT represents some sort of solution, one may ask: What then is the problem?

The problem cannot be said to be an overall decline of the local political public sphere. True enough, the channels traditionally connecting citizenry with the political representatives, i.e. the parties and the printed press have been in steep decline for a number of years; however, new forms of participation have developed since the 1970s. These new forms do not replace the traditional channels – neither when considering grassroots participation, so-called "user participation" nor new forms of participation arising from other ways of orienting oneself politically. To some degree these forms of participation operate on separate levels: at the system of government and at the system of policy network, respectively. The disintegration of the "old" lines of connection between the members of society and their political representatives is therefore not compensated for by the

emergence of new forms of participation. Thus it is not democracy as such, but rather, the classical form of representative democracy that has come under pressure.

The renewal of the democratic lines of connection therefore poses a challenge. This challenge is even greater in the municipalities, as a new role for politicians was formulated in the 1990s, according to which municipal politicians are to engage themselves less with administration and more with the general steering and formulation of objectives. If local politicians are to be able to manage this role in the crossfire between, on the one side, involved and demanding citizens, and on the other side tight budgets, they require new democratic channels and forms of communication.

Furthermore, the network-like way of doing things is deemed by many to be a more attractive and appropriate way of becoming involved in politics than being represented by a political party, attending a political meeting or writing a letter to the editor. The channels traditionally connecting local citizens with local politicians seem to be in decline qualitatively, as well as in quantitative terms.

The question, then, is whether something should be done to renew these lines of political communication. The answer to this question depends highly on one's perspective on democracy. If one looks at the changes from an aggregative view on democracy, e.g. a consumerist one, the answer would be: "*not necessarily*"; however, for deliberative democrats the changes may lead to a growing imbalance between the two parts of the local public sphere. The problem here is not the lack of deliberation in the system of policy networks. A considerable amount of deliberation actually proceeds in these networks. The problem is that deliberation and/or negotiations often take place behind closed doors, and it is not always clear who is included and excluded from these networks.

The different perspectives on the public sphere are based on different perceptions of the guiding principles of democratic legitimacy. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that while it is important in a deliberative model that arguments for and against various policies are tested in public, it is less important in aggregative models of democracy.¹ For the deliberative democrats the solution should,

however, not be regarded as something like the restoration of a “golden past” where citizens were citizens and consumers were only present in the marketplace. Rather, it should be seen as an attempt at enhancing participation in the common public space, thus creating a better balance between the two systems of participation and representation.

Could ICT contribute to a “solution”? The potentials are obvious. Firstly, ICT provides citizens with easier access to relevant political information. It becomes easier for citizens to control decision-makers and bureaucrats and ICT can contribute to the transparency of the system of decision-making and implementation. Secondly, ICT can open new channels for participation – a new “opportunity structure” if you will, wherein citizens can raise issues concerning themselves and the broader community. Thirdly, ICT can contribute to the development of public interactive systems of communication, partly amongst citizens themselves and partly between citizens and public authorities, including the political representatives.

Deliberative democrats place particular emphasis on the latter point. ICT is perceived here as a device for creating new virtual public spheres. These should not be looked upon as alternatives but rather as supplements to the existing publics. As a parenthesis one should note that in this context, ICT is not sought used to strengthen direct democracy, where many believe the potentials of ICT to lie, but instead to strengthen representative democracy by increasing deliberation as a basis for decisions made by political representatives.

The potentials of ICT to widen deliberation in public play a minor role for proponents of aggregative models. For them, the purpose of employing ICT is first and foremost to improve the outcomes of political decisions: in short, to increase “value for money” in public service production and management. Participation by citizens is primarily a means to achieve that end. Functional representation through a system of policy networks is therefore also regarded as an effective way of bringing the preferences of the citizen-consumer into the system of decision-making and implementation.

Some might argue that deliberation on the Net is a “contradictum ad adjecto”. This would probably also be true if one applies the strong Habermasian criteria for a proper public dialogue. These are, however, neither realistic nor desirable. We will instead underline three main features of a typical deliberative democracy. First, that one’s opinion is subjected to public scrutiny for validation. Second, that all those concerned have equal opportunity to participate in the process. Third, that the citizens are stimulated to orient themselves towards matters of common concern.

I shall now proceed to the *topical common spaces*, as the connecting role to be played by ICT is not only in the common public space. This could also be the case in various local communities, e.g. local associations. These communities do not merely deliver input to the system of policy networks in the form of specific interests and expertise – they are also capable of supporting civic participation in the common political space. This is a classic point of view that can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville: as independent spheres of self-governance based on the active participation of members, the topical common spaces are important for forming a civic background-culture. This is the perspective of the ideal-type, at least – for a myriad of reasons, real life often has an entirely different outcome. Most of the members of contemporary associations are passive, choosing not to become involved in the democratic rule of their group.

It therefore becomes obvious to ask whether ICT could assist with the improvement of internal communication and participation in voluntary associations. Of course ICT could obviously facilitate internal coordination. However, from a deliberative democratic point of view one may also ask whether it is possible for ICT to help broaden and intensify member involvement. We should not expect ICT to turn “spectators” into “gladiators” in the old-fashioned way. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that ICT could help form internal discussion forums and to restructure the classical hierarchical form of organisation into more loose-coupled networks.

In the following I will first give some examples *of the use of ICT to enhance the local political public sphere*. Thereafter I will discuss *what can be said so far about*

the impact of such initiatives. Finally I will discuss why e-democracy has a rather low priority on the political agenda.

ICT and the local political public sphere

I will address the first question by focussing on the role of local councils, which are capable of taking action in various fields. First, they can support the deployment of the ICT-infrastructure in both physical and organisational terms, thus facilitating Net-access. Second, they can provide citizens with relevant information, both as regards general public data and data concerning the individual citizen himself *in addition to* opportunity to contact local authorities by e-mail. Third, they can stimulate public dialogue, partly by providing the necessary applications for a free debate, partly by consulting citizens on different matters through digital hearings, chats etc. Fourth, they can support the implementation of ICT at the level of citizens and groups. This may help promote communication within existing groups and associations, but it may also help create what Castells (2001: 55) has referred to as "self-directed networking" as a tool for organisation, collective action and the development of the self.

I shall say a little about the second, third and fourth dimensions. Some time ago we conducted an investigation of all municipal websites in Denmark to examine the degree to which they have utilised ICT to create new opportunity structures for civic participation. We discovered more variation than had been expected, but in general I think we can say that most local councils have a fairly good standard concerning information and openness, whereas very few local councils employ ICT as a means of strengthening public dialogue one way or the other.

A good example of the poor use of ICT for democratic purposes is a new web-portal entitled "Danmarksdebatten". It is hosted by the National IT and Telecom Agency (*IT og Telestyrelsen*) and has existed for almost one year. All public authorities and interest groups are offered the discussion-module free of charge. It is very easy to employ and can be totally integrated in the homepages of the affiliated authorities and groups. Nonetheless, thus far only two ministries, one county, six local councils, two public institutions, one media and one citizen have employed the module.

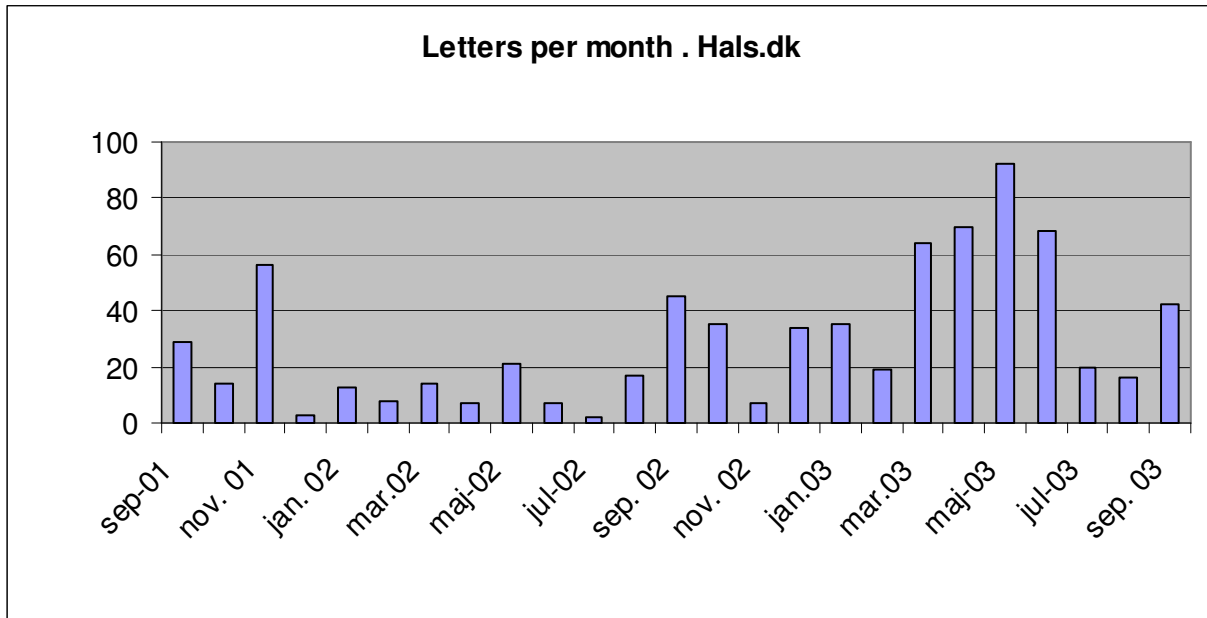
The public authorities are not alone in their reluctance to employ ICT to further communication in these fields; ordinary citizens also seem to share this reluctance to some extent.

Table 1. "Danmarksdebatten". Number of contributions

None	1-4	5-9	10-30	>30
6	16	4	6	4

36 themes have been presented in "Danmarksdebatten". There was no reaction in six of the cases. 16 of the cases gave rise to debate with 1-4 participants. Four cases had 5-9 participants. In six cases 10-30 participated, and only four cases had more than 30 participants in the debate. This can in no way be considered to be impressive. Actual dialogue has taken place in a small minority of cases, and it is remarkable that elected politicians have only been present in a single case. This could confirm suspicions that digital hearings are used to signal a willingness to be open and responsive without being accompanied by a genuine will to engage in dialogue with the citizenry.

Compared to Danmarksdebatten, the extent of the debate in the small municipality of Hals outside Aalborg can almost be described as a success.¹ Hals.dk is an interactive portal between public authorities, citizens and associations in Hals. A total of 738 contributions have been made since its inception in autumn 2001 until October 2003, and an overall increasing tendency can be observed.



Several different themes have been presented; some have been initiated by the local council, others by citizens. The most successful of the themes proposed by the local council in terms of postings has been the debate over the budget for 2002, with a total of 78 postings. Compared to the debate on "Danmarksportalen", it is a positive sign that the local councillors have been active on Hals.dk. 12 of the 17 council members have made at least one contribution to the debate.

However, one ought to be cautious with the interpretation of these figures. Delving deeper, one will find that the contributions are concentrated to relatively few persons. The 738 postings/letters are distributed among a total of 107 persons, corresponding to between 1-1½ percent of the adult population in Hals. Furthermore, less than 10 percent of all participants have apparently posted more than 70 percent of all the messages.

I think these examples reflect the general picture rather well – also when considering other countries: few stories of relative success and abundant failures.

Concerning the fourth dimension, I have no comprehensive view on what has been done; however, my feeling is that it is relatively little. Some projects within the "Digital North Denmark" are worth mentioning, among them the project in Hals. As part of the Hals project, all associations have been offered assistance to design

their own homepage. The initiatives in Odder – a rural Danish town – are also worth mentioning. Citizens in Odder are offered support to create their own homepages and to join a digital citizen network.

The impact of the Net on the local political public sphere

An examination of the impact of various experiments with e-democracy on the local political public sphere should be conducted on several dimensions, addressing the following three questions as a minimum: 1) What, how and where does the Net supplement political communication with something new? 2) For whom is the Net a useful media of political communication? 3) What is the effect of the Net, if any, on local political culture, including the generation of social capital?

I shall limit myself to a few brief remarks on the first and second questions. The Net has undoubtedly facilitated access to information, just as it has become easier to contact political authorities. Nevertheless, the implications of this for civic participation and influence in terms of agenda-setting and policy making remains an open question. Generally, there is little evidence supporting the view that Net participation makes a difference – at least not at the local and national levels. We have not found any concrete examples in Hals thus far.

In that respect the medium remains new and far from presenting a real threat to the old media. I will illustrate this point with the case I am most familiar with, namely Hals. Here the local newspaper, Nordjyske Stifttidende, seems to cover issues with significance for the public interest relatively well. On Hals.dk, however, the issues discussed are far more incidental. Furthermore, it seems as though Hals.dk is not regarded as being equally important for local political communication as Nordjyske. This is confirmed in some of the interviews conducted. While Hals.dk is now more than two years old, there would still appear to be a degree of “secrecy” surrounding it, i.e. familiarity with the site is not particularly widespread.

In Hals this acknowledgement has now lead to the conclusion that more should be done to make Hals.dk a central forum for local politics, and that guidelines to this end should be incorporated in the new ICT-politics for the municipality.

On the positive side, it should be mentioned that there are topics on Hals.dk that would never find their way to other media, i.e. topics ranging from "my cat has run away" to significant issues of "life and death". Furthermore, it should be added that a forum for digital discussion provides room for more extensive and lively debate than is possible in the printed media. This is clearly demonstrated on Hals.dk and other websites. We should therefore not only look for impacts in terms of influence on agenda-setting and policy making, but also in terms of general opinion formation and impact on the political culture.

With regard to the second question, all investigations indicate that Net participants involve "the usual suspects". The Net largely seems to reproduce the existing divides in the population. Having said that, it should be added that the discussion forum on the Net has provided some locals with a platform they never would have possessed in the "old" media. This simultaneously reflects the Net's strengths and weaknesses.

With regard to the use of ICT in voluntary associations, we still require data that can tell us more about the impact of ICT. The preliminary results from a survey conducted among associations in Hals indicate that ICT is used in the internal communication of associations, but not to the extent that one would have expected. Moreover, there are no signs thus far indicating that ICT is used to develop the internal public of the associations.

The priority of e-government over e-democracy

In summary, then: most local authorities are not making active use of the Net to enhance the local common public space. In those instances where such attempts have been made, they have had little success thus far. One could then conclude that citizens are not generally interested in making use of the Net to discuss local political issues. Such a conclusion, however, would be too hasty. Another more obvious reason for the few attempts to utilise the Net to broaden the local common public space is the priority of e-government over e-democracy.

This order of priority has been evident in reports and action plans, publications and recommendations from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (*Videnskabsministeriet*) and from Local Government Denmark (*Kommunernes*

Landsforening) from the mid-1990s onwards. According to these reports, the advantages of ICT are primarily to be found within the areas of internal, administrative coordination and with municipal service provision, e.g., information about services, regulations and self-service options on the Net.

To some extent, e-government and e-democracy deal with different aspects of the political process. While e-democracy focuses on the input side of the political system, i.e. the representation of citizens and the process of policy making, e-government focuses on the output aspect of the political system, i.e. the implementation of policies, including the contacts between public authorities and various affected groups and stakeholders.

As several have observed, it has become quite difficult to separate these two aspects of the political process from one another. For the same reason it is difficult to maintain a clear distinction between e-government and e-democracy.

Nevertheless, the distinction is reproduced in both government and scientific reports, and the distinction is very clearly reflected in the following two definitions. The first, from the Danish Ministry of Finance (*Finansministeriet*), concerns e-government. The second is on e-democracy and comes from the Hansard Society (an independent British organisation working to promote effective parliamentary democracy).

“e-government is the use of ICT to improve and make the handling of public management tasks more efficient for the benefit of citizens, companies and the public sector” (Danish Ministry of Finance).

“The concept of e-democracy is associated with efforts to broaden political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their representatives via new information and communication technologies” (Hansard Society)

While the definition of e-government signals cost reduction, efficiency and knowledge management, the definition of e-democracy signals participation, empowerment and dialogue. The definitions naturally reflect a different focus on the two sides of the political process (output versus input); however, this does not entirely explain the very different content. The backgrounds for the two definitions are two very different normative approaches to the public sector: while the

interpretation of e-government is anchored in various discourses of new public management, e-democracy is linked to different versions of participatory or deliberative democracy.

The priority of e-government over e-democracy can be regarded as resulting from:

- The dominance of the managerial view on the public sector and the accompanying reduction of citizens to consumers.
- The widespread belief that digital administration or e-government can rationalise public service and save money.
- The view that ICT is a central media for reforms in the structure of local administration, including the development of new units of service-management and new forms of service-delivery to the citizen-consumer organised across existing organisational boundaries.

At the same time, the managerial view and the assumed benefits of ICT-mediated reforms in the public sector reinforces the existing order of priority in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: First of all, it confirms the understanding of municipalities as service-providing entities and the role of citizens as consumers. This marginalises the local common public space as a central forum for political development and weakens the arguments for developing a virtual common public space. Secondly, the priority of e-government over e-democracy means that projects within the field of e-democracy are gone about half-heartedly. As indicated above, this is apparently one of the problems in "Denmarksdebatten". The failed e-democracy projects confirm sceptical sentiment that ordinary citizens are not interested in local politics in general, exclusively interesting themselves in certain matters, and that they therefore only have specific interests as citizen-consumers and stakeholders.

A small example illustrating how firmly the managerial view and the consumer model of interaction is anchored: KMD-dialogue has introduced a new school portal that is offered to all schools in Denmark. The system facilitates digital communication at all levels in the relations between school management, teachers, pupils and parents. Only one relation has been "forgotten", namely between the elected school board and the parents, even though this relationship may be

considered to be the cornerstone in the management of Danish primary and lower secondary schools (*folkeskolen*). The example illustrates the pressure on representative democracy, going beyond the municipal level to the level of individual institutions.

One would expect that one group would defend the principles and practise of representative democracy more than any other, namely the elected political representatives themselves. This for the very obvious reason that in the municipal government of tomorrow, the politicians risk becoming marginalized and isolated, as the actual decisions will increasingly be made in direct interplay between the consumers and the institutional providers of public services; however, there are only few signs of initiatives from the local politicians. They seem to refuse to commit themselves, waiting instead for citizens to express need for more virtual public communication. If this is the case, the politicians may well wait in vain.

The politicians seem to be trapped in a dualism between the system of government to which e-democracy is linked and a system of policy networks to which e-government is linked. Nevertheless, as the distinction between e-government and e-democracy is more a distinction between two different views on the public sector than a distinction between various ICT-mediated public activities and as contemporary government has become part of a larger system in which public services are provided through a network of public and private organisations, it would be more useful to employ the term *e-governance* instead of e-democracy and e-government. From a deliberative perspective this would imply that we should consider possible deliberative democratic aspects of e-governance instead of treating e-government and e-democracy as two more or less distinct systems of interaction.

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