

Politics: Deliberation, Mobilization and Networked Practices of Agitation

Merlyna Lim and Mark E. Kann

During the decade and a half since the release of NCSA-Mosaic, the first viable Web browser, the Internet has gone from being a promising platform for politics to an integral part of daily political life. Even before the Web, during the 1992 presidential elections, third-party presidential candidate and technology entrepreneur Ross Perot called for “electronic town halls” that would allow citizens to communicate directly with elected officials as a corrective to the well-funded special-interest groups that he saw pervading politics.¹ In fall 2007, the two-year-old video-sharing site YouTube teamed with CNN (founded in 1980 as the “Cable News Network” but also one of the most popular online news sites) to co-sponsor Democratic and Republican presidential debates in which citizens submitted questions to the candidates through videos they produced themselves and uploaded to the site. For David Bohrman, chief of CNN’s Washington bureau, this new model was “the most democratic of all possible structures,” facilitating direct dialogue between politicians and the public.² During the Democratic debate, a snowman asked candidates about his future in a world of global warming, a lesbian couple challenged candidates to answer whether or not they would one day be able to get married, and a man holding a gun that he called his “baby” inquired into candidates’ positions on gun control. Although the responses from the candidates were business-as-usual, the YouTube debates emphasized that the Internet had become part of mainstream politics.

Today, both in the United States and other countries, it is common for citizens, candidates, political parties, fund-raisers, consultants, lobbyists, interest groups, legislators, and bureaucrats to have online strategies for advancing their goals. “E-government” literature is saturated with suggestions on how individuals, groups, and officials can communicate and compete more effectively, improve job performances,

enhance public services, strengthen legitimacy, and heighten impact. From producing videos for dissemination primarily on YouTube to maintaining active campaign blogs, politicians and government officials on the Left and Right alike use the Internet to spread their message.

But has the Internet transformed politics in any way? Perot was by no means alone when he suggested the Internet would breed a more democratic political culture. In 1993, Mitch Kapor, co-founder of renowned online civil rights non-profit, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, called for a new “Jeffersonian Ideal ... a system that promotes grass-roots democracy, diversity of users and manufacturers, true communications among the people, and all the dazzling goodies of home shopping, movies on demand, teleconferencing, and cheap, instant databases ... composed of high bandwidth, an open architecture, and distributed two-way switching.”³ A year later, Al Gore described his vision of the Internet as a “Global Information Infrastructure” that would “allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community...” In essence a “distributed, parallel computer ... a metaphor for democracy itself,” Gore imagined this network of networks enabling widespread participation from citizens, its fora giving rise to “a new Athenian Age of democracy.”⁴

If the Internet has been embraced by politicians, does it succeed in fulfilling the vision of its early 90s boosters? Does it short-circuit the few-to-many discourse that dominated the twentieth century (that is, politicians or mass media disseminating their message to a passive mass audience), replacing it with a many-to-many dialogue (in which both means of production and distribution of political ideas would be available to all)?

In other words, does the Internet form a new public sphere or does it merely perpetuate the existing conditions? For philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who defined the term, “public sphere” refers to “a network for communicating information and points of view” in which democratic deliberation takes place.⁵ By exchanging views on matters of common concern in a rational process of debate, citizens formed opinions that then shaped political decisions. Habermas understood there to be only one, universal public sphere that all citizens would be able to take part in and saw the press as a critical check on political discourse. But Habermas’s account of the public sphere was a eulogy. The bourgeois public sphere that he observed emerged in coffee houses and salons in the eighteenth century in which middle-class citizens, all (in theory) of equal status, discussed issues and reason prevailed. But Habermas concluded that as capitalism developed, the uneven distribution of wealth and the emergence of mass media extinguished the capacity of citizens to have their voices heard, damaging the public sphere.⁶

If politics under the Internet is to do more than just perpetuate business-as-usual, it will have to structurally alter the political process itself. Advocates of the Internet as a venue for deliberative democracy and advocates of online democratic mobilization suggest that it can do just that.⁷ Two examples that we could take as representing a turning point in the use of the Internet for political purposes highlight these different aspects of how democracy might be transformed online.

The first came in the aftermath of 9/11, taking the form of an Internet-based dialogue to address what should be built on the World Trade Center site. Sponsored by The Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey the 2002 “Listening to the City Online” program brought 800 citizens into deliberative dialogue about how to redevelop the site and how to create a memorial for the victims. Through a process of structured, guided discussion and deliberation, participants contributed their positions to decision makers.⁸

Three years earlier, during the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, online activists mobilized protests against globalization in what came to be known as “the Battle in Seattle.” Like the Internet itself, these actions were distributed, the product of many individuals and groups acting on their own initiative. Web sites like SeattleWTO.org and Seattle99.org linked together activists, helping incoming protestors find local hosts to stay with. Listservs allowed many-to-many discussions between activists. A fake Web site (www.gatt.org) parodied the WTO while the Independent Media Center (www.indymedia.org) served as a more legitimate media outlet for participatory journalists. This alternative news organization helped relatively powerless groups frame and disseminate their message as well as exercise leverage against a powerful, international organization.⁹

At a glance, in the two examples above, the Internet’s promise to become a new democratic public sphere seems to be fulfilled. In “Listening to the City Online,” deliberation processes took place online through a series of virtual meetings and dialogues. In the “Battle in Seattle,” creative uses of Internet media mobilized publics to real-world action and garnered widespread attention to their cause. Here we see two different yet overlapped modes of democratic action. The first mode is deliberation, referring to the involvement of citizens in decision-making by engaging them in discussions on issues, soliciting their opinions on various points of view, and encouraging them to converse with one another to think critically about choices they make together. The second mode is mobilization, referring to the creation of broad social networks of people around a shared interest in blocking or promoting social change. Public deliberation can be a prelude to mobilization, can be a form of

mobilization, and can anticipate a more democratic future. Democratic mobilization elicits deliberation over goals, strategies, and tactics.

Still, priorities differ: deliberative democracy prioritizes the centrality of public talk in democratic governance; democratic mobilization emphasizes public activism against undemocratic forces.

While the examples seem convincing, is the Internet really a new, democratic public sphere in which those who rarely participate inform themselves, deliberate important issues, find their political voice, and thereby reshape political culture, if not public policy? Is the Internet likely to function as a democratic instrument for grassroots activists to challenge the authority and hegemony of powerful economic and political elites at home and abroad?

To be sure, some people successfully engage in online discussions that might eventually become deliberative processes, while others mobilize in collective movements. But in both cases there are inevitably more people who do not participate even though they are active Internet users. To complicate the issue, even if there are some successful examples of mobilization, not all projects are democratic; some are uncivil, anarchic and even undemocratic.

The growing importance of the Internet does not mean that the medium necessarily fosters greater democracy. Some skeptics point out that the kind of big media channels that dominated conventional politics in the pre-Internet era continue to dominate discourse in today's networked world.¹⁰ Moreover, the vast amount of information available on the Internet is more than a storehouse of public knowledge; it is also a treasure trove for anti-democratic forces intent on monitoring, scrutinizing, and sanctioning dissidents in particular and citizens in general. Thus, for example, citing its need to cooperate with the laws of the countries it does business in, Yahoo! recently helped the Chinese government identify a journalist who was subsequently jailed for divulging state secrets.¹¹ So, too, other scholars suggest that the very vastness and non-hierarchical nature of the Internet makes finding authoritative information difficult or, conversely, that our ability to tailor information to our own interests means that we effectively put blinders on with regard to matters that *should* be of concern to us even though they may not be within our narrow frame of reference.¹²

In this chapter, we do not attempt to find a definitive answer as to whether or not the Internet promotes democracy or if it is a new public sphere. More modestly, we argue that the Internet is a convivial milieu in which various political uses, are thriving and new tools for political criticism and commentary are emerging. We show this by first comparing online efforts to promote deliberative democracy and democratic mobilization to understand how activists use the Internet to advance

democracy. Beyond that, we look at blogging and remix, new types of political participation classifiable neither as mobilization nor as deliberation.

The Internet as Convivial Medium

To get a better grasp on the Internet's impact on politics, we turn to philosopher, educator, and social critic Ivan Illich's idea of a "convivial" society. Illich sought a postindustrial society that would maximize individual creativity, imagination and energy rather than one that aimed to maximize outputs as is the case in an industrial society. Behavior in a convivial society is composed of autonomous and creative interaction among individuals and their environments, a sharp contrast to the conditioned response of individuals living with reified social relations in an artificial, man-made milieu. Conviviality, for Illich, is by no means unfettered individuality. To the contrary, in his view, individual freedom is realized through interdependence and, as such, has an intrinsic ethical value. Ultimately, a convivial environment favors the freedom, autonomy, equality, and creative collaboration conducive to democracy.¹³

Popular in the 1970s, Illich's theories inspired some early pioneers of personal computing such as Lee Felsenstein, founder of the seminal Homebrew Computer Club (a Silicon Valley group that provided fertile ground for the development of the personal computer, its members including Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak) and designer of the Osborne 1, the first portable computer and Seymour Papert, creator of the Logo programming language and proponent of using computers to educate children.¹⁴ Although these individuals succeeded in creating convivial milieus in computer culture and in schools, respectively, these were still local conditions dependent on face-to-face interaction. Moreover, if the personal computer laid the groundwork for a convivial society, it was still primarily a tool for individuals and therefore harder to apply to groups or to society as a whole. In contrast, since the Internet is dependent on the principle of connection it is inherently a single convivial milieu on a global scale.

The Internet is the product of the *convergence* of communication technologies. It is a network over which a variety of media can flow without regard to their specific qualities. Thus, the Internet can emulate traditional media such as print, radio broadcasting, telephony, television, and other existing technologies. But the Internet not only facilitates the traditional modes of one-to-one communications (as with telephone and telegraph) or one-to-many communications (as with newspapers and television), it also permits new forms of many-to-many and peer-to-peer communications and sharing.

Crucially, this convergence is achieved at *low cost*. The Internet is a relatively inexpensive technology, cheaper than even the telephone. It is inexpensive (even free) and easy to publish material on the Internet, either through the Web or by e-mail. Texts and images can be published without editorial interference and can rapidly achieve wide circulation.

Through Internet cafés and other public access points, the Internet is *broadly available* not only in developed countries but also in developing countries. Even for small organizations, the Internet already offers the least expensive means of communication capable of global reach.

The inherently decentralized character of the technology makes it relatively *difficult to control* or censor. While it is not non-hierarchical, the Internet is a network of networks, less hierarchical than previous media and communication technology. Although censorship, surveillance, and disruption can and does occur, it is limited by the nature of the network. A firewall can be set up and filtering can be applied, as China has done, but sufficiently savvy users usually can find ways to get messages to their intended destinations.¹⁵ Moreover, the sheer volume of information flooding the Internet limits the effectiveness of most surveillance and censorship efforts.

Just like any other technology, the Internet can reinforce existing relationships between those who control technology and those who consume its products. Older applications of the Internet distinguish a distinct separation between producers and consumers. For example, early forms of Web sites functioned like bulletin boards or newspapers. Readers were meant to consume the content and had no tools with which to respond to, or change the content. But new applications and delivery platforms such as blogging software (for example, Blogger and Typepad), community-oriented content management systems (Drupal and Civicspace), news feed reading and aggregation software (My Yahoo, Planet Aggregator, Feedreader) and video distribution platforms (Google Videos and Youtube) allow users to personalize their Internet intake and create their own content, giving rise to *amateur* producers who are at the same time also consumers, audiences, critics, and fans of—as well as collaborators with—other amateurs.

Characterized by *convergence, low cost, broad availability, resistance to control* and the emergence of *amateur production*, the Internet, is a “convivial medium” with a greater scope for freedom, autonomy, creativity, and collaboration than previous media. To be clear, however, there is nothing inherent in Internet technology that automatically achieves this potential. Unlike many theorists of post-industrialism, postmodernism, and information society, we do not see technology as a causal agent having a pivotal role in social change.¹⁶ Nor do we see technology as neutral, its roles and outcomes completely determined by users. Rather, we

understand artifacts as both constituted by society and constituting society. Social arrangements and contexts around the technology—human choices and politics—are key in deciding the impact of the Internet on politics but so are the inherent limits and possibilities of technologies.

Online Deliberation

Theories of deliberative democracy attracted great attention in the 1990s when Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls published key treatises on the topic. In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas revisited possibilities for a renewed public sphere centered on inclusive, public deliberations free from inequalities and coercion. Deliberative citizens, in Habermas's model, would follow the force of the better argument, functioning "as a sounding board" for the political system.¹⁷ Rawls's *Political Liberalism* begins with the assumption that people have different comprehensive views of the common good. The best way to build a stable society that respects these differences is, Rawls argues, to institute a deliberative democracy in which citizens have the knowledge and desire "to follow public reason and to realize its ideal in their political conduct." Rawls points out that deliberative citizens "explain to one another ... how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason." They deliberate "as if they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes ... they would think it most reasonable to enact."¹⁸

In the late 1990s, scholars and advocates of deliberative democracy turned to the Internet, envisioning cyberspace as a new, democratic public sphere in which peer-to-peer exchanges and many-to-many forums would enable large numbers of citizens to deliberate on a broad range of public issues and express their informed, thoughtful views in ways that would influence and express public opinion as well as urge, if not compel, cooperation by political decision-makers.

Advocates of online deliberation understand it as not merely an online version of offline deliberation, but also as able to solve problems associated with face-to-face discussions. If an ancient barrier to democracy was that only a few people could assemble in one place at one time to carry on public discourse, the Internet enables vast numbers of people to assemble in virtual space. As Stephen Coleman and John Götze suggest in their defense of online deliberation, the problem of time can also be overcome by "the asynchronous nature of online engagement ... [which] makes manageable large-scale, many-to-many discussion and deliberation."¹⁹ Moreover, although no one has the time to deliberate on every issue the Internet can host an unlimited number of forums and citizens can participate in issues of importance to them.

Online deliberation can bring together a mix of people who would not ordinarily encounter each other or talk to each other in everyday life. Online forums designed to ensure diversity may reduce common misunderstandings across class or racial divides, promote a degree of empathy, and foster greater mutual respect if not consensual agreement. By contrast, there is evidence that deliberation among like-minded people tends to produce greater polarization and extremism on public issues.²⁰

The practice of online deliberation has, thus far, been modest. For the most part, online deliberation has made online forums available to citizens and nonprofit organizations that invite the public to deliberate local issues and has offered online services to elected officials and political bureaucrats who want to consult with a broad range of citizens and stakeholders.

The most common model of online deliberation adapts offline deliberative practices to the Internet. James Fishkin's innovative Deliberative Polling, which combines face-to-face talk and public opinion surveys, is now being conducted online, reducing organizing costs and participant inconveniences.²¹ Similarly Beth Noveck recommends adapting the Citizens' Jury model to an online environment. Introduced in Great Britain in the 1990s, a Citizens' Jury consists of a randomly selected panel of citizens who act as representatives of their community, meeting for several days at a time to examine a public issue. The jury hears amateur and expert witnesses, deliberates on the issue, and presents recommendations to the public. Noveck's idea is to assemble Citizens' Juries online, employing new media tools to "delineate a problem, visualize and map out causes and effects, think through options, provide information and collectively design solutions."²²

Other developers set out to create forms of deliberation specific for the Internet, creating online forums to bring information, rationality, reciprocity, and civility to the Internet's new public sphere. Unchat promises to marry "the proven value of facilitated group conversation to the efficiency of the Internet to create productive, democratic decision-making."²³ Web Lab hosts online dialogues "designed to avoid the pitfalls and weaknesses of typical computer bulletin-boards: the 'drive-by' postings encouraged by the Internet's easy anonymity and fluid boundaries; the assertion of polarized positions, where the give-and-take of civil discourse would have more social value; and the pandering to appetites for quick sensation rather than the creation of a real forum."²⁴ e-Liberate, developed by Evergreen State College applies Robert's Rules of Order to online discussions.²⁵ Information Renaissance sponsors online forums that assemble "members of the public to learn about a complex issue and discuss it with subject experts, public advocates, and policy makers." Online participants access a briefing book, participate in dialogues, consult experts, and make recommendations.²⁶

Yet other groups use the Internet to assist face-to-face forums. America Speaks hosts the 21st Century Town Meeting, employing Internet technology to merge small, face-to-face group dialogues with large-scale gatherings, followed by online deliberation.²⁷ Another group favors Wisdom Councils, in-person deliberations extended with “group-ware.”²⁸ Others promote Internet-assisted consultation and rulemaking to enable the citizens and stakeholders to give informed advice to public officials who make laws, policies, and administrative rules.²⁹ Big players such as NGOs and government bodies are interested as well: the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) promotes citizen consultations, including online forums and bulletin boards, citizens’ juries, and e-community tools.³⁰

All three approaches emphasize rule-bound deliberation. This is typical of deliberative democracy: rules are intended to foster equality (everyone should be able to contribute), diversity (of participants and positions on issues), and common goals.³¹ Procedural rules are important as well. For example, “The navigation of Unchat is expressly designed to promote... deliberation. A participant wanting to jump into a conversation must first pass through the library. ...After the library, participants may be asked to take a quiz.”³² Most online forums have a facilitator “to provide discursive focus, stimulate groups into interacting constructively, build a sense of team spirit or community, referee, troubleshoot and keep time.”³³ The facilitator might be a professional or participant whose job is to keep discussions on track and enforce rules of discourse.

Web Lab embeds rules in code. Participants must register, “creating a ‘screen name’ and password, providing an email address, some basic information about themselves, and a short self-description.” The software assigns a small number of diverse individuals to a dialogue group, which is then closed to new members but open to online discussions. Participants receive brief biographies of other members. Discussions are self-moderated but observed by a monitor to “watch for technical glitches, spot interesting dialogues to highlight in the Featured Posts section, or bring important issues you ask us to address to our attention.”³⁴ Unchat software allows participants to take turns wielding the gavel to enforce a fairly strict set of rules; however, users may seek to modify the rules.³⁵ Finally, e-Liberate has embedded rules promulgated by online displays regarding what “legal actions” are available to participants at any point in a discussion.³⁶

The degree to which online forums are preoccupied with rules, procedures, and moderators varies. But most groups that host online forums see rules as a matter of survival, a critical means of defense against

Box 3.1. On Deliberation

From: Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard Law School, *Online Deliberative Discourse Research Project* (2000), <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/projects/deliberation/>.

Most self-organizing online communities reflect a judgment we share: that democracy is the best means by which cyberspaces may be governed. The demonstrated nature of online communities as places where communication and discussion are valued suggests that deliberative discourse (i.e., reasoned communication that is focused and intended to culminate in group decision-making) is the form of democracy most prized online. Cyberspace also naturally supports another feature that is highly desirable for deliberative discourse: equality among the participants, including especially an equal ability to disseminate information to contribute to reasoned decision-making.

Governance of online communities requires the consent of the governed in a way and to a degree that physical communities do not. Coercive power over the body of a participant, the ultimate if often unspoken tool of offline governance, does not exist over the incorporeal citizens of online communities. Control by those in authority online ends, as does that of offline counterparts, at the borders of whatever spaces comprise the polity. However, unlike in offline jurisdictions, online authorities have no significant means by which to force their citizens to remain in those spaces. This is a difference at the most basic level: not even the presence of members of self-organizing online communities is assured. For any reason or no reason at all a member can simply leave the community, sacrificing whatever social investment he has made there, usually without financial or physical loss. This essential fact of online participation demands a structure that is encouraging, egalitarian, productive and rewarding. If the process of online discourse and decision-making is unpleasant, elitist, non-productive and/or time wasting, then people will vote with their browsers by failing to log on. ...

The Internet is perceived as the next great leap forward in political and organizational interaction. However, the technology on which it rests is complex and often hidden from view. Computer programmers are in some respects the cyberspace equivalent of politicians smoke-filled back rooms. If political processes are to move online, it is essential that the code, which facilitates and constrains the discussion and measures the community's opinion, must be as open and transparent as the systems of democratic government that we most admire. Public interest sponsorship of such code ... is critical if online deliberation is to become a trusted and valuable tool of democracy.

Internet spammers, trolls, and ideologues who might seek to disrupt or polarize dialogue, rather than participate in it.³⁷ And yet, those same rules create a high barrier of entry to dialogue, undoing the very ease of access that the Internet affords.

This preoccupation with rules is consistent with online deliberative democrats' modest aspirations for democracy. Effective online forums aim to produce three results. First, participants become more thoughtful and their views are taken more seriously. When deliberators know that their informed voice is being heard, they are likely to overcome their distrust of public officials.³⁸ Second, public officials become more trusting of informed citizens and, by listening to them, achieve greater legitimacy in their legislative and policy-making functions.³⁹ Third, online deliberation "deepens the relationship between decision makers and the public," inviting people to become more engaged in civic life while expanding "the scope, breadth and depth of government consultations with citizens."⁴⁰ The ideal result is a partnership that, in the words of Coleman and Götze, "acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue—although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government."⁴¹

Organizers of online forums clearly desire to make deliberation safe for public officials and urge them to involve themselves in deliberation. They believe this will encourage greater public participation in discussions and increase the likelihood that the public's informed voice will be heeded by public officials. From the vantage point of deepening democracy, this desire to include public officials is both promising and problematic.

It is promising in the sense that it encourages civic engagement and it potentially closes the gap between citizens and their representatives. This fosters a sense of efficacy, builds social capital, and encourages popular participation in public life. Furthermore, to the extent that deliberative forums deliver thoughtful recommendations, law-makers and policy-makers will have a greater incentive to solicit public advice and be guided by citizens in the future.

On the other hand, a partnership between citizens and public officials is problematic. When Benjamin Barber called for deliberative democracy in his 1984 book, *Strong Democracy*, he concluded that deliberative talk must be linked to citizen decision-making and democratic activism. He argued that citizens are sovereign and have a right not only to deliberate but also to decide public issues and mobilize against dominant elites that monopolize decision-making power.⁴² By contrast, online deliberation is not premised on citizen sovereignty, decision-making authority, or political struggle against dominant elites. Rather, it emphasizes constrained talk and mostly accepts the current distribution of power by ceding decision-making authority to public officials who—partners or

not—rarely defy the interests of dominant elites.

To be sure, online deliberative democrats help fulfill the convivial potential of the Internet. They provide many people access to forums for deliberation on a range of public issues. They try to involve decision-makers in online forums, thereby assuring participants that their voices will be heard. They seek to build a new public sphere in which rationality rules, citizen's voices are heard, and public officials heed the *demos*. In theory, the growth of this new public sphere should result in greater citizen satisfaction, greater government legitimacy, and greater political stability within established governmental jurisdictions—such as cities, states, and nations. Online deliberative democracy does not directly address ongoing inequalities that threaten individual liberty, autonomy, creativity, and democratic collaboration. Nor does it directly address issues that reach beyond established government jurisdictions to the global arena. In effect, it contributes to democratic government where it more-or-less exists but it cannot contribute to struggles to contest the influence of local and global elites who use economic as well as political power to undermine human rights, perpetuate injustices, and defeat democratization.

Online Mobilization

In cases where rational dialogue does not seem possible, online mobilization offers an alternative. Critics of postmodernism such as Alain Touraine point out that even in present-day democracies, the state, the market, and the media are gradually diminishing the liberty of the individual, failing to guarantee freedom, equality and fraternity.⁴³ In response, Habermas suggests that new social movements outside of the traditional public sphere are developing.⁴⁴ These new social movements are broad alliances of people sharing an interest in blocking or promoting social change, for example standing against globalization (since most governments endorse globalization, it tends not to inspire a social movement to promote it), for or against immigration, for or against abortion, for or against various human rights such as the rights of homosexuals to marry, gender equality, and so on.

Historically, activists have been quick to incorporate media such as publications, radio, television, and film to mobilize their constituencies to action. During the past decade, progressive activists have turned to online forms of communication, community building, and resistance.⁴⁵ The recent upsurge of online mobilization includes global support for peace movements, opposition to the Iraq war, and protests against neo-liberal organizations.⁴⁶ Online mobilizations have also developed at the local and national levels, yet involve actors focused on global issues. Some of the

most prominent examples include online activism in support of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, the Free Burma Coalition, and the pro-democracy movement and political revolution in Indonesia in May 1998.⁴⁷

Usually, mainstream media, with or without collaboration by activists, have played an important role in portraying political activism. Although this could be beneficial in increasing exposure, it could also distort or simplify the messages that activists intended. The Internet allows activists themselves to frame their issues and shape their public identities.

The Internet allows online organizers to combine the advantages of one-to-one communication, one-to-many broadcasts, and many-to-many media. This enhances opportunities for activists to mobilize and promote their causes. Successful online actions, such as the worldwide anti-war protest initiated by MoveOn.org, are testimony that the Internet can facilitate global activism more directly and quickly than previous technologies.⁴⁸ The Internet's broad availability along with its one-to-many and many-to-many modes of communication make it possible for an organization to quickly and affordably reach a large group of people while targeting communications to specific parties. Mobilizing online also enables activists to talk back, responding by e-mail or by use of platforms that allow for questions and elaborations. The result is a partial move from "face-to-face" to "faceless" tactics, with protest happening online, in coordinated (yet physically separated) actions around the world.

For online mobilization at the local and national levels, the Internet provides a global dimension. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas is an example. One analysis of the communication dimension of the movement observed that the "most striking thing about the sequence of events set in motion on January 1, 1994, has been the speed with which news of the struggle circulated and the rapidity of the mobilization of support which resulted."⁴⁹ The Internet and the Association for Progressive Communications networks enabled the Zapatistas to bypass government control and get out their message. Global communication networks facilitated support activities and organized protests in more than forty countries, from marches, raves, and readings in San Francisco to a rally in the Piazza del Popolo in Rome.⁵⁰

Another example is the case of Free Burma in which Burmese dissidents used the Internet to create a global network of resistance against the military junta in power. Started by a Burmese student living in exile, the network enabled exiles from Burma who shared similar political concerns to coordinate, bringing issues such as human right violations in the country to the media attention and to put pressure on the military regime by encouraging companies to stop investing or operating in Burma. The Internet helped various organizations to coordinate their

activities, allowing them to orchestrate ground actions as a collective instead of as a set of disparate individuals.⁵¹

Online organizing tools have the potential to increase the scale of organizing efforts while keeping costs low. With e-mail, it is possible to send out one million announcements, donation solicitations, and calls for action for next to nothing. E-mail functions not only as a one-to-many form of distribution but also as a peer-to-peer form of distribution as individuals forward messages to their like-minded friends. Indeed, as the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization demonstrated, e-mail can be very effective in the preparation for and the follow-up to demonstrations.⁵²

Nevertheless, the Internet is rarely the sole theater of activity for social movements. The success of mass events like the Seattle protests requires the use of multiple media and organizing tactics. “Intermodality” between the Internet and other media networks as well as between cyberspace and geographical “place” is generally necessary to allow activists to produce and disseminate information as well as to organize and mobilize for action.⁵³

The successful pro-democracy movement in Indonesia in 1998 shows that the links between the Internet and more traditional media and existing social networks were to be crucial. The Zapatistas’ use of guerilla radio in addition to the Internet and the hybrid use of text messages sent by cell phone messages sent by e-mail in the EDSA II “People Power” movement in the Philippines in 2000-2001 are just two examples of the strategic importance of “intermodality.”⁵⁴

The Internet is not a passive medium, on the contrary, it challenges conventional structures for organizing social movements, encouraging the undoing of hierarchical and centralized communications in favor of more decentralized and distributed organizational structures.⁵⁵ Previous communication technologies, even grassroots organizing techniques such as phone and fax trees, required somewhat hierarchical structures. By contrast, (unmoderated) mailing lists and peer-to-peer applications such as e-mail make it possible for activists to organize quickly, with little logistical coordination or organizational oversight.

Thus, the Internet’s inherent conviviality enables rapid, widespread mobilization. But although it is faster to mobilize participants around shared issues, such bonds are not necessarily long lasting. Online protest groups tend to be single-issue based, ephemeral, and shortsighted in terms of the scope of change they wish to effect.

While ultimately possessing some characteristics that favor activist movements, the Internet is not a tool that can resolve all problems intrinsic to democratic mobilization. In fact, the Internet has the potential to amplify movements of any kind, regardless of their ideologies, purposes,

Box 3.2. On Mobilization

From: Geertz Lovink and Florian Schneider, "A Virtual World is Possible: From Tactical Media to Digital Multitudes," (2003), <http://www.makeworlds.org/node/22>.

By the end of the nineties the post-modern time without movements' had come to an end. The organized discontent against neo-liberalism, global warming policies, labour exploitation and numerous other issues converged. Equipped with networks and arguments, backed up by decades of research, a hybrid movement gained momentum, wrongly labelled by mainstream media as anti-globalisation. It seemed one of the specific flags of that movement, that it hasnt been able and willing to answer the question, which constitutes any kind of movement on the rise, any generation on the move: what's to be done? There was and there is no answer, no alternative either strategic or tactical to the existing world order, to the dominant mode of globalisation.

And maybe this is the most important, and liberating, conclusion: theres no way back to the twentieth century, the protective nation state and the gruesome tragedies of the left. It had been good to remember, but equally good to throw off, the past. The question what's to be done should not be read as an attempt to re-introduce Leninist principles in whatever form. The issues of strategy, organization and democracy belong to all times. We neither want to bring back old policies through the backdoor, nor do we think that this urgent question can be dismissed with the (justified) argument of crimes committed under the banner of Lenin. When he looks in the mirror Slavoj Zizek may see Father Lenin, but thats not the case for everyone. It is possible to wake up from the nightmare of historical communism and (still) pose the question: whats to be done? Can a multitude of interests and backgrounds ask that question, or is the agenda the one defined by the summit calendar of world leaders and the business elite?

Nevertheless, the movement has been growing rapidly. At first sight, by using a pretty boring and very traditional medium: the mass-mobilization of tens of thousands in the streets of Seattle, hundreds of thousands in the streets of Genoa. Tactical media networks played an important role in its coming into being. From now on pluriformity of issues and identities was a given reality. Difference is here to stay and no longer needs to legitimize itself against higher authorities such as the Party, the Union or the Media. This is the biggest gain compared to previous decades. The multitudes are not a dream or some theoretical construct but a reality.

If there is a strategy, its not contradiction, but complementary existence. Despite theoretical deliberations, there is no contradiction between the street and cyberspace. The one fuels the other. Protests against WTO, neo-liberal EU policies, and party conventions are all staged in front of the gathered world press. Indymedia crops up as a parasite of the mainstream media. Instead of having to beg for attention, protests place under the eyes of the world media during summits of politicians and business leaders, seeking direct confrontation. Alternatively, symbolic sites are chosen such as border regions (East-West Europe, USA-Mexico) or refugee detention centres (Frankfurt airport, the centralized Eurocop database in Strasbourg, the Woomera detention centre in the Australian desert). The global entitlement of the movement adds a new layer of globalisation from below to the ruling mode of globalisation, rather than just objecting to it.

and goals. Online mobilization is not inherently democratic by any means. Anarchic, radical fundamentalist, and even terrorist groups also employ online mobilization as part of their struggles and strategies. Extremist groups such as Al Qaeda as well as smaller radical fundamentalist groups such as Stormfront in the United States and Laskar Jihad in Indonesia have used the Internet to mobilize. Just like advocates of democracy, extreme fundamentalist groups rely on the Internet to widen their scope of operation, reach broad audiences, and mobilize to gain more influence and power.

“Backing into the Future”?

In practice, online mobilization has been more successful than online deliberation. In contrast to online deliberation’s rule-bound systems, online mobilization’s looser, distributed nature is more in keeping with the Internet’s informal, convivial, nature and is thus able to thrive online.

It is striking, however, that both online deliberation and online mobilization rely so much on traditional tactics but as Marshall McLuhan suggests, this is the norm rather than the exception: “when faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.” In short, online activism scholar Graham Meikle describes this as “backing into the future.”⁵⁶ Most online deliberation projects move offline forums to cyberspace, connect to offline forums, or emulate offline forums. The tactics of online democratic mobilization, such as online petitions and virtual sit-ins, are derived from traditional activities, such as paper petitions and actual sit-ins.

But “backing into the future” does not mean that online activists are not being innovative. Rather, it suggests that they frame online mobilization by the socio-technical ecology of traditional mobilization. In effect, online activists re-invent familiar activist methods. The success of online mobilization may be related to its familiarity.

That activists are “backing into the future” does not prevent online innovations—such as site hijackings, hacktivism, e-mail distribution trees, smart mobs or flash mobs from emerging. While these phenomena can be seen as digital analogues of traditional tactics such as sabotage, letter writing, phone and fax trees, and street demonstrations, they have qualities that make them unique and provide a foundation for further innovation.

Although online deliberative democracy and online democratic mobilization are central in academic discourse on online politics, they represent only a fraction of online political activities. The most vibrant

political activities in network culture are not actually located in collective political actions such as deliberation and mobilization, but rather are located between private and private, between private and public, and between publics. They emerge in the overlapping domains of politics and culture, simultaneously among multiple layers of social networks, between multiple networks of individuals, and between individuals and collectives, creating a sphere of networked politics. Popular examples of such activities include online political art, cartoons and videos. In this chapter, however, we will focus on blogging and remix as they have the lowest threshold of skill and technology necessary for entry and are currently the most common of these activities.

Political Blogging

Defined by Wikipedia as “web-based publication[s] consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally in reverse chronological order),”⁵⁷ blogs allow their creators to frequently and easily update information and to elicit discussion among their readers by recording comments.

In the domain of politics, blogs became popular during the 2004 United States Presidential campaign. Until then, even the most popular blogs received only a tiny proportion of the web traffic that major media outlets attracted and politicians did not see them as having a serious political role.⁵⁸ The turning point was Howard Dean’s *Blog for America*, which showed how a blog could be used for building social networks of political support. Dean’s employment of blogging and the rapid rise in the popularity and proliferation of political blogs that year demonstrated their potential to politicians. In subsequent years, blogging has become much more popular, with about 57 million American adults reading blogs by 2006.⁵⁹

Admittedly, political blogs are only a fraction of the blogosphere. All sorts of content can be found on blogs—from announcements of new gadgets to discussions of films and television to first-hand accounts of child-rearing—but many of these, such as one the most popular blogs in the world, Boingboing, blur this distinction by also commenting on political matters.⁶⁰ Moreover, many political blogs have devoted readerships. The progressive American blog Daily Kos, for example, attracts about 600,000 visitors per day and has between 14 million and 24 visits per month, making it one of the most popular collaborative blogs in the world.⁶¹ In contrast, *the Nation*, which describes itself as “the most widely read weekly political opinion magazine in America” had only 187,000 subscribers in 2005.⁶²

Some observers see blogs as a catalyst for change, a people’s media and an empowering tool. They see the rise of blogs beginning an era of

citizen journalism in which the marginalized can play a greater role in making rather than merely consuming news. Others argue that public debate would be dramatically revitalized if politicians would all start blogging.⁶³

But what role do blogs really play in empowering society? Are they a real breakthrough in online politics? We identify several problems in the current practice of political blogging. First, the blogosphere suffers from an unequal distribution of readers. While there are over a million bloggers in the United States posting approximately 275,000 new items daily, the average blogger has almost no influence on other blogs as measured by traffic. The distribution of links and traffic is skewed so that only a handful of bloggers get most of the readers. Generally speaking, these are either those who got established in the blogosphere early when there was little content, or were already well-known as journalists or politicians such as Ariana Huffington.⁶⁴

This tendency shows that the blogosphere is not an exemplary public sphere in which everybody's voice is heard. If this could be also seen as a selection process, weeding out the "bad" blogs, it also favors players who got in early or who make outlandish statements to attract readers.⁶⁵

Second, some studies show that rather than creating a new public (blog)sphere, bloggers tend to be polarized along ideological lines. Lada Adamic and Natalie Glance's study on the American political blogosphere, as illustrated in the map in figure 1, finds "liberals and conservatives linking primarily within their separate communities, with far fewer cross-links exchanged between them. This division extended into their discussions, with liberal and conservative blogs focusing on different news articles, topics, and political figures."⁶⁶

But such studies give rise to questions. Does the polarization of the American blogosphere mirror society itself? Or does the blogosphere cause this polarization? Is the polarization it causes substantially greater than through other media?

These are not easy to answer. We can hypothesize that the culture of linking in the blogosphere may still create more exposure to divergent ideas than people otherwise experience in real space, and thus, we could suggest that it is not a contributing cause of existing political polarization. Or, to the contrary, we could argue that the vast body of metadata produced by tagging content on services like Technorati makes it possible for a blogger to easily find information that confirms what she or he already believes, reinforcing polarization. Nevertheless, that same social metadata would also increase serendipitous exposure to information that the blogger might disagree with, producing a different result. Empirical research is needed to answer such questions.

If polarization is one potential problem, another is that there is no

central organization to the blogosphere and little consensus among bloggers with regard to many key issues. This creates a virtual Tower of Babel in which voices tend to become so particular and so exclusionary of other views as to be unable to communicate to each other or to a broader audience. On the other hand, the proliferation of unique points of view in the blogosphere may encourage genuinely individual voices to emerge and perhaps even foster real dialogues (as opposed to the watered-down positions distributed in mass media).⁶⁷

The amateur status of bloggers also raises questions. Most bloggers are part-timers for whom blogging is a voluntary endeavor. Amateur bloggers do not, in general, have the resources and capacity to investigate material prior to publishing it. Thus, from a journalistic point of view, the credibility of blog entries generally cannot meet that of articles in mainstream media. On the other hand, the voluntary nature of blogging means that it is also a positive way for regular people to voice their opinions without going through the filtering effects of traditional journalism.

Yet another concern is the increasing tendency for the top blogs to resemble old media. Technomeme's top 100 Leaderboard, for example, includes old media players such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Associated Press*. New blogs that manage to get into the top 100 such as TechCrunch, GigaOm, and Engadget are far from the "people's media,"⁶⁸ heavily backed up by professional writers, editors, graphic designers and marketing people. This shows that blogosphere, too, is dominated by existing structure of media power and ownership where individuals hardly have much space and power to play significant role.

The blogosphere is not, and will never be, an ideal political sphere. Nor will it produce a common ground of rational communicative discourse. Nevertheless, political blogging is a unique online practice that expands the political sphere from the elites to commoners more effectively than previous Internet applications such as Web sites could. Moreover, while blogs might not be true examples of deliberative democracy, the kind of two-way communications that blogs facilitate between bloggers and people who leave comments on their blogs are facilitated with ease in the blogosphere. Although this will not create a true Habermasian public sphere, the multiple networked political spheres it generates are positive.

Political Remix

A variant of online activism takes place in the hybrid realm of culture and politics. The emergence of DIY (Do-It-Yourself) audio and video authoring tools and sites to which individuals can easily upload the content they generate has fostered the rise of a remix, mash-up culture

focused on politics and political issues. A term used in the music industry, remix refers to alternative versions of audio or visual compositions derived from the original material. During the last few years, virally distributed remix videos and ads with political messages have become quite popular.

Political remix is not new but rather borrows from many movements within modernism and postmodernism such as appropriation, collage, assemblage, Dada, surrealism, Situationism, and punk rock that alter images so as to subvert them as well as audio movements such as reggae, hip hop, and DJ culture that do the same for music. As these earlier movements did, rather than supporting the status quo, remix changes visual imagery to convey a radical or oppositional message.

What contemporary remix offers is the ability to use digital technology to create convincing works that may not seem like remixes and then to distribute them on the Internet freely, widely, and in a reasonably short time. In the past, DIY culture was samizdat, distributed to a small group only, generally through mail or in localized communities. Although convivial, it could not reach beyond its narrow community.

Indeed, as author William Gibson suggests, remix is the very nature of today's digital world.⁶⁹ New paths of information exchanges between people keep growing, making the the Internet a densely networked social milieu. This stimulates people to produce (and consume) by drawing information from multiple sources, remix and make it into their own, and share it to others. The emergence of the social web, or "Web 2.0" enables a kind of "collaborative remixability," a phrase coined by Barb Dydwad to refer to "a transformative process in which the information and media we've organized and shared can be recombined and built on to create new forms, concepts, ideas, mashups and services."⁷⁰

Political remix engages mainstream political artifacts. Remix artist-activists recognize that the products of mainstream politics (such as political news on CNN) are source material that can capture widespread attention. By mashing up, remixing, or playing out alternative narratives, remix activists transform mainstream artifacts to promote new political messages. Many remix videos edit existing ads or news footage to create parodies and satires with new political meanings.

One well-known example of remix is the video "Bushwacked 2." Through careful editing of George W. Bush's 2003 State of the Union address, British satirist Chris Morris edited Bush's speech so that he would make pronouncements such as "We are building a culture to encourage international terrorism," and "I have a message to the people of Iraq: Go home and die."⁷¹ "Hummertruth," a spoof on a Hummer H2 commercial, is another prominent remix.⁷² By adding subtitles, social activist Jonathan McIntosh transformed a Hummer ad into a powerful commentary, suggesting that the vehicle was an icon of environmental degradation.

Box 3.3. On Blogging

From: Ross Ferguson and Milica Howell, *Political Blogs: Craze or Convention?* (2004), <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/files/folders/472/download.aspx>.

The main political value of blogging is not to be found in politicians presenting themselves to an audience of potential voters, but in the dense networks of intellectual and channels of communication that support their values and prejudices and symbolic intercourse involving millions of private-public bloggers. The blogosphere is characterised by three democratising characteristics. Firstly, it provides a bridge between the private, subjective sphere of self-expression and the socially-fragile civic sphere in which publics can form and act. As democracy becomes more sensitive to affective dimensions, attention is paid to a revalued recognition of subjective and intersubjective articulations. As several commentators have observed, it is often within the safety of private or familiar environments that people feel most able to speak as citizens. By allowing people to both interact with others and remain as individuals, blogs provide an important escape route from the “if you don’t come to the meeting, you can’t have anything to say” mentality.

Secondly, blogs allow people – indeed, expect them – to express incomplete thoughts. This terrain of intellectual evolution, vulnerability and search for confirmation or refutation from wider sources is in marked contrast to the crude certainties that dominate so much of political discourse. As Mortensen and Walker have explained: “We post to our blogs as ideas come to us. Daily, hourly, weekly; The frequency varies, but it is a writing that happens in bits and pieces, not in the long hours of thought that suit the clichéd image of the secluded scholar in the ivory tower. In this sense blogs are suited to the short attention span of our time that worries so many traditionalists. Blogs are interstitial for the writer as for the reader.”

Thirdly, blogs lower the threshold of entry to the global debate for traditionally unheard or marginalised voices, particularly from poorer parts of the world which are too often represented by others, without being given a chance to present their own accounts. Blogs such as Hossein Derakhshan’s Editor: Myself (<http://hoder.com/weblog/>), the South Korean Ohmy News (<http://www.ohmynews.com/>) and Blog Africa (<http://blogafrica.com/>) are refreshing additions to a global debate in which contributors have tended to be better at speaking for than listening to the world’s least privileged.

It is as channels of honest self-presentation that blogs make their greatest contribution to democracy. If Walter Cronkite’s famous sign-off, “That’s the way it is” was the dictum of the world of media-represented factual certainties, “That’s the way I am” is the dictum of a self-expressive culture where truth emerges in fragmented, subjective, incomplete and contestable ways.

Box 3.4. On Remix

From: Eduardo Navas, "Turbulence: Remixes + Bonus Beats, 3 x 3: New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence," Jo-Anne Green and Helen Thorington, eds., Turbulence.org (2006), http://transition.turbulence.org/texts/nmf/Navas_EN.html.

Generally speaking, remix culture can be defined as the global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies that is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste.^a The concept of Remix often referenced in popular culture derives from the model of music remixes which were produced around the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York City with roots in Jamaican music.^b Today, Remix (the activity of taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into new forms according to personal taste) has been extended to other areas of culture, including the visual arts; it plays a vital role in mass communication, especially on the Internet.

Loops are also essential to computer technology, for what else does the computer do but execute loops to know what it should be doing at all times? In the days before the first computers, people did calculations manually, but at one point the need to have repetitive computations performed in a more efficient way became a concrete idea.^c And in 1945, with ENIAC, computers started to take over the role of human computers.^d The concept of loops played a crucial role in culture at this time, as Pierre Schaeffer and Stockhausen were creating compositions consisting of loops that were performed not by humans but by machines.^e The loop in music became crucial for DJ Culture, as has already been pointed out; and DJ culture would meet digital culture in new media art, in particular Internet art. This merging is crucial to Remix.

The remix is always allegorical following the postmodern theories of Craig Owens, who argues that in postmodernism a deconstruction, a transparent awareness of the history and politics behind the object of art is always made present^f...Meaning that the object of contemplation...depends on recognition (reading) of a pre-existing text (or cultural code). The audience is always expected to see within the work of art its history. ...Postmodernism [is], in effect, remixed modernism...[H]istories that are constantly revised in Remix.

But, to be clear-no matter what-the remix will always rely on the authority of the original song. The remix is in the end a re-mix-that is a rearrangement of something already recognizable; it functions at a second level: a meta-level. This implies that the originality of the remix is non-existent, therefore it must acknowledge its source of validation self-reflexively (even when it is a selective remix). In brief, the remix when extended as a cultural practice is a second mix of something pre-existent; the material that is mixed for a second time must be recognized otherwise it could be misunderstood as something new, and it would become plagiarism. Without a history, the remix cannot be *Remix*.^g

a. This is actually my own definition extending Edward Lessig's definition of Remix Culture based on the activity of "Rip, Mix and Burn." Lessig is concerned with copyright issues; my definition of Remix is concerned with

aesthetics and its role in political economy. See Edward Lessig, "Free," *The Future of Ideas* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 12-15.

b. For some good accounts of Dj Culture see Ulf Poschardt, *Dj Culture* (London: Quartet Books, 1995); Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1999); Javier Blázquez and Omar Morera, eds., *Loops: una historia de la música electrónica* (Barcelona: Reservoir Books, 2002).

c. Scott McCartney, "The Ancestors," *Eniac*, (New York: Walker and Company, 1999), 9-27.

d. Women working in the basement of the University of Pennsylvania's Moore School during WWII were called "computers" because they calculated (computed) ballistic missiles tables all day. See, McCartney, 95- 97.

e. Rob Young, "Pioneers," *Modulations* (New York: Caipirinha, 2000), 10-20.

f. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," eds., Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker, *Art After Modernism* (New York: Godine, 1984), 203-235.

g. DJ producers who sampled during the eighties found themselves having to acknowledge History by complying with the law; see the landmark law-suit against Biz Markie in Brewster, 246.

While most remix work concentrates on American politics, creative political artifacts in a non-American context exist as well such as "Zendani Siasi," a political music video with sequences that emphasize the Iranian regime's oppressive nature and the well-known "French Democracy," a machinima video that provides an alternative narrative on recent riots in France.⁷³

Admittedly, it is possible to see remix productions as products of an apolitical youth culture, aestheticizing political issues. Still, these amateur productions exemplify how individuals can become actively engaged in the networked political sphere. Instead of blindly consuming political information, they express political views by producing and distributing their own works. While the responses do not always aim to mobilize opinions or toward tangible actions, political remix itself is ultimately a form of mobilization. Even when remixes do not endorse particular political views, remixing itself is a practice that inherently mobilizes resistance against top-down mass-media messages. We agree with Henry Jenkins that the very ability of amateurs to express and disseminate their cultural preferences is an important aspect of democracy in contemporary society.⁷⁴

Again, these works may not always foster democratic values. Participatory remix culture is not inherently democratic; it is convivial. It

enables amateur producers to make statements that widen the spectrum of contestations over political meanings and practices. By opening a new avenue for participation, political remix culture potentially contributes to the formation of a more open, diverse, and egalitarian political segment in the networked publics.

Conclusion

Analyzing various modes of political participation, this chapter suggests that the Internet is not an ideal public sphere in which effective and robust public participation takes place. But this does not mean that political spheres generated by the Internet do not contribute to the democratic enhancement of political system. The Internet is a political artifact that is politically constituted as well as constituting. A convivial medium, it is open to various uses.

We have argued that the Internet does provide a sympathetic milieu for deliberative democracy and democratic mobilization. At the same time, we also suggest that it is misleading to claim that online deliberation and online mobilization practices have really deepened democracy.

For the foreseeable future, online deliberation and online mobilization are forms of democratic participation that have different, sometimes conflicting purposes. Rule-bound deliberation is slow and ponderous, emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and expertise, focuses on government laws and policies, and succeeds when citizens partner with government officials in the service of good decisions, political legitimacy, and social stability. Democratic talk potentially deepens democracy where it more-or-less exists. In contrast, mobilization often requires quick, decisive action, emphasizes people's identities as historical agents of change, focuses on corporate influence within and beyond political jurisdictions, and succeeds when activists disrupt and disable undemocratic corporate entities and dictatorships from committing injustices. Democratic mobilization deepens democracy where it does not prevail. But, as the Internet speeds up the process and widens up the scale, online mobilization is always in danger of being "too fast, too thin, and too many."

If the Internet will extend the reach of both deliberative democracy and democratic mobilizations, it does so by "backing into the future." Offline deliberations are either the explicit source of, or an implicit model for, developing online forums. While the Internet provides several advantages, such as the ability to host conversations with thousands of diverse participants at a time, face-to-face discussions also have advantages—especially where interpersonal trust is crucial for developing a consensus. Similarly, online mobilization has advantages that cannot be

reproduced offline, but face-to-face gatherings may be necessary to sustain, organize, and focus political movements over time. Whether it is a matter of democratic talk or action, then, we can expect to see hybrid forms of online and offline participation in the future.

Perhaps the more interesting question is whether these hybrids will be sufficiently creative, engaging, and energizing to motivate the apathetic, ambivalent, or immobile among us to give democratic participation a try. In general, activism has always required great self-sacrifice and a substantial time commitment, a price too high for most people. In contrast, the Internet opens the door to part-time deliberation and part-time activism.

Still, as we argue, the more promising forms of online politics are not bound within a framework of conventional politics. Activities that don't fit into the traditional political framework, such as political blogging and political remix, thrive on the Internet.

While it is not an ideal public sphere, political blogging creates an accessible medium for Internet users to communicate with other users. Despite its limitations and problems, we think that political blogging has the potential to give rise to new political positions and to bring together people around those interests.

So, too, the online participatory culture of remix facilitated by affordable digital technology, networked tools, and social software promotes a sense of cultural agency and fosters peer-to-peer networks, indicating that the Internet may become a more powerful gateway for people formerly on the sidelines to become local, even global activists.

We want to emphasize that the Internet enables multiple, overlapped and diverse networked political spheres to emerge. These are contested spheres that are sometimes messy, chaotic, segmented and even anarchic. Not all of these aim to advance and deepen democracy, but within these convivial spheres individuals and groups have more chance to be political.

Ivan Illich says: "What are needed are new networks, readily available to the public and designed to spread equal opportunity for learning and teaching."⁷⁵

Little by little, we may be getting there.

Notes

-
1. R. Michael Alvarez and Thad E. Hall, *Point, Click, and Vote: The Future of Internet Voting* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004), 54.
 2. Luke O'Brien, "YouTube and CNN Discuss 'Most Democratic' Presidential

-
- Debate Ever,” *Wired Blog Network*,
http://blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/2007/06/youtube_and_cnn.html
3. Mitch Kapor, “Where is the Digital Highway Really Heading?” *Wired* 1.03 (1993), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/1.03/kapor.on.nii_pr.html
4. Al Gore, “Remarks to the International Telecommunications Union,” (speech, International Telecommunications Union, Buenos Aires, October 13, 1994), http://clinton1.nara.gov/White_House/EOP/OVP/html/telunion.html.
5. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 360.
6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 33, 36, 41, 51, 171, 212.
7. For deliberative democracy on the Internet, see for example Antje Glimmer, “Deliberative Democracy, the Public Sphere, and the Internet,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 27, No. 4 (2001): 21-39, On democratic mobilization in the wake of the Howard Dean campaign, which utilized online community-building resources, see Steven Levy, “Dean’s Net Effect is Just the Start,” *Newsweek* (March 29, 2004), <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4563310/site/newsweek/>.
8. Civic Alliance to Rebuild Downtown New York, *Listening to the City Report of Proceedings*, 2002, http://www.weblab.org/ltc/LTC_Report.pdf
9. Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, “The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests,” *Peace Review* 13, no. 3 (2001): 331-337.
10. Clay Shirky, “Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality,” first published February 8, 2003 on the “Networks, Economics, and Culture” mailing list, http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html.
11. “Yahoo ‘Helped Jail China Writer,” *BBC News*, September 7, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4221538.stm>
12. Cass Sunstein, “The Daily Me,” in *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-22.
13. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). The first use of the term “conviviality” to describe the socio-technical landscape of the Internet is found in Merlyna Lim, “The Internet, Social Network and Reform in Indonesia” in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in A Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 274.
- 14 Lee Felsenstein, “Convivial Cybernetic Devices,” interview with Kim Crosby, *The Analytical Engine 3* <http://www.opencollector.org/history/homebrew/engv3n1.html> and Seymour Papert, *The Children’s Machine. Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer* (New York:

Basic Books, 1993), 141-144.

15 Richard Clayton, Steven J. Murdoch, and Robert N. M. Watson, "Ignoring the Great Firewall of China," (lecture, 6th Workshop on Privacy Enhancing Technologies, Robinson College Cambridge, UK, June 28, 2006), <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rncl/ignoring.pdf>.

16. Bell (1973) sees technology a central organizing factor in social transformation. For Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1983), information technology is a central agent in the development of the postmodern condition. Similarly, Castells (1999) argues that information technology is the principal driving force in the "network society".

17. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 305-06, 359.

18. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 217, 444-45, 448, 481.

19. Stephen Coleman and John Gotze, "Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation," (report, Hansard Society, 2001), 17, <http://bowlingtogether.net/>.

20. James S. Fishkin, comments at the Networked Publics Conference and Media Festival, Los Angeles, CA, April 28-29, 2006; Cass Sunstein, "Deliberation Day and Political Extremism," The University of Chicago Law School Faculty Blog, comment posted on February 2, 2006, http://uchicagolaw.typepad.com/faculty/2006/02/deliberation_da.html. See also Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

21. Shanto Iyengar, Robert C. Luskin, and James S. Fishkin, "Deliberative Preferences in the Presidential Nomination Campaign: Evidence from an Online Deliberative Poll," (research paper, The Center for Deliberative Democracy, 2005), 4, <http://cdd.stanford.edu/research/index.html>.

22. Beth Simone Noveck, "A Democracy of Groups," *First Monday* 10/11 (2005), http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue10_11/noveck/index.html; Jefferson Center, *Citizens Jury® Handbook*, 2004, 3, <http://www.jefferson-center.org/vertical/Sites/%7BC73573A1-16DF-4030-99A5-8FCCA2F0BFED%7D/uploads/%7B7D486ED8-96D8-4AB1-92D8-BFA69AB937D2%7D.PDF/>.

23. Bodies Electric LLC, "What is Unchat?," <http://www.unchat.com/unchat.html>.

24. Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, "Transforming Dialogue: Web Lab's Explorations at the Frontiers of Online Community," (report, MacArthur Foundation and Markle Foundation, 2000) <http://www.weblab.org/sgd/evaluation.html>.

-
25. Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility Public Sphere Project, "About e-Liberate: Support for Online Deliberation," 2004, <http://trout.cpsr.org/program/sphere/e-liberate/about.php>.
 26. Information Renaissance, "Information Renaissance Model for Online Dialogues," http://www.info-ren.org/what/dialogues_background.shtml.
 27. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer and Steve Brigham, "Taking Democracy to Scale: Creating a Town Hall Meeting for the Twenty-First Century," *National Civic Review* 91, 4 (Winter 2002): 353-60. http://www.ncl.org/publications/ncr/91-4/ncr91-4_chapter6.pdf
 28. Jim Rough, "The Wisdom Council: A Strategy for We the People to Create True Democracy," Center for Wise Democracy, <http://www.wisedemocracy.org/papers/Localdemocracy.html>.
 29. Robert D. Carlitz and Rosemary W. Gunn, "Online Rulemaking: A Step Toward E-Governance," *Government Information Quarterly* 19 no 4 (2002): 389-405; Chris Lang, "A Brief History of Open Consulting," <http://www.opencl.org>.
 30. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Policy Brief: Engaging Citizens Online for Better Policy-Making," *OECD Observer* (policy brief, 2003), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/23/2501856.pdf>.
 31. Nicholas W. Jankowski and Renee Van Os, "Internet-Based Political Discourse: A Case Study of Electronic Democracy in Hoogeveen," in *Democracy Online: The Prospects for Political Renewal Through the Internet*, ed. Peter M. Shane, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 183-84.
 32. Beth Simone Noveck, "Unchat: Democratic Solution for a Wired World," in *Democracy Online*, 32-33. http://www.nyls.edu/docs/noveck_unchat.pdf
 33. Coleman and Gotze, "Bowling Together," 18.
 34. Adams and Goldbard, "Transforming Dialogue," 13; Caruso, "Improving Dialogue," 11-13.
 35. "What is Unchat?"
 36. Public Sphere Project, "About e-Liberate."
 37. Clay Shirky notes, "The communities that thrive [online] violate most or all of the earlier assumptions. Instead of unlimited growth, membership, and freedom, many of the communities that have done well have bounded size or strong limits to growth, non-trivial barriers to joining or becoming a member in good standing, and enforceable community norms that constrain individual freedoms. Forums that lack any mechanism for ejecting or controlling hostile users ... have often broken down under the weight of users hostile to the conversation." (Clay Shirky, "Social Software and the Politics of Groups," Clay Shirky's Writings About the Internet. (March 9, 2003), http://shirky.com/writings/group_politics.html).

-
38. Coleman and Gotze, "Bowling Together," 13.
39. Thomas C. Beierle, "Digital Deliberation: Engaging the Public Through Online Public Dialogues," in Shane, *Democracy Online*, 157-58.
40. Lukensmeyer and Brigham, "Taking Democracy to Scale," 352; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Engaging Citizens Online."
41. Coleman and Gotze, "Bowling Together," 13.
42. Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), ch. 10.
43. Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).
44. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action (Vol. 2): Lifeworld and System* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 392.
45. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
46. Lauren Langman, Douglas Morris and Jackie Zalewski, "Cyberactivism and Alternative Globalization Movements," in Wilma A. Dunaway, ed., *Emerging Issues in the 21st Century World-System* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2003), 218-35.
47. On the Zapatista movement, see Harry Cleaver, "The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Class Struggle in the New World Order," *Riff-Raff: attraverso la produzione sociale* (Padova, Italy: 1994), 133-145, <http://libcom.org/library/chiapas-uprising-future-class-struggle-new-world-order-cleaver>; John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar* (monograph report: RAND, 1996); David Ronfeldt, Jon Arquilla, Graham Fuller and Melissa Fuller, *The Zapatista "Social Netwar" in Mexico* (monograph report, RAND, 1998). On Indonesia, see Merlyna Lim, *@rchipelago Online: The Internet and Political Activism in Indonesia*, (PhD dissertation, University of Enschede, 2005).
48. MoveOn.org is perhaps the most famous online social movement organization in the history. It started its debut in 1998 by launching an online petition against the impeachment of Clinton. It became famously known world-wide in 2001 with its online peace campaign following the WTC attack on September 11, 2001, which was quickly signed by more than half a million people. For further information about MoveOn.org, see <http://www.moveon.org/about.html> and/or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MoveOn.org>.
49. Cleaver, "The Chiapas Uprising."
50. Harry M. Cleaver, "Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism," <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/~hmcleave/polnet.html> and

-
- Adrienne Russell, "Myth and the Zapatista Movement: Exploring a Network Identity," *New Media and Society* 7, no. 4 (2005), 572.
51. Viola Krebs, "The Impact of the Internet on Myanmar," *First Monday* 6, no. 5 (2001), http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_5/krebs/index.html.
52. Stefano Baldi, "The Internet for International Political and Social Protest: the case of Seattle," Research Paper No. 3 (Rome: Policy Planning Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, 2000).
53. Lim, *@rchipelago Online*, 183.
54. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Philippine Activism, At Push of a Button: Technology Used to Spur Political Change," *Washington Post*, December 10 (2000), A44; Vicente Rafael, "The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines," *Public Culture* 15, no 3 (2003).
55. Rob Stuart and Jed Miller, "The Net Works: Prospects for Advocacy and Mobilization Online" (report, The E-Volve Foundation, 2003), http://www.jedmiller.com/graphics/netadvocacy_v2_04.pdf.
56. Graham Meikle, *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message* (New York, Bantam Books, 1967), 74-75.
57. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>.
- 58 The 2003 Pew Internet Survey reports that only 4% of Americans reported going to blogs for information and opinion (Pew Internet Project, "Blogs gain a small foothold").
- 59 Amanda Lenhart and Susannah Fox, "Bloggers: A Picture of the Internet's New Storytellers." (report, Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2006), http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/186/report_display.asp.
- 60 A rough ranking of boingboing's popularity can be found at <http://technorati.com/pop/> Note also that the Huffington Post, a political blog is among the top five.
- 61 Sitemeter, *Daily Kos: Site Summary*. Retrieved on 2007-01-11. <http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=sm8dailykos>.
62. Mike Webb, *The Nation* Publicity Directory, Press Release, "Victor Navasky to Step Down from Nation Helm After 28 Years," November 7, 2005, <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/news2005/1107-04.htm>.
63. Dan Gillmor, *We the Media* (Cambridge, MA: O'Reilly, 2004).
64. Matthew Hindmann, Kostas Tsotsioulis, and Judy Johnson, "Googlearchy: How a Few Heavily-linked Sites Dominate Politics Online," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia,

PA, August 2003.

65. Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality."
66. Lada Adamic and Natalie Glance, *The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 U.S. Election: Divided They Blog*, (March 4, 2004), <http://www.blogpulse.com/papers/2005/AdamicGlanceBlogWWW.pdf>.
67. Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 2001); Anthony G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000).
68. Techmeme Leaderboard, October 22, 2007, <http://www.techmeme.com/lb>.
69. William Gibson, "God's Little Toys: Confessions of a Cut & Paste Artist," *Wired* 13.07 (2005), <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/gibson.html>.
70. Barb Dybwad, "Approaching a definition of Web 2.0" posted to The Social Software Weblog, September 29, 2005, <http://socialsoftware.weblogsinc.com/2005/09/29/approaching-a-definition-of-web-2-0/>.
71. David Smab, *Bushwacked2* (UK, 2003), http://www.warprecords.com/news/?offset=0&ti_id=573.
72. Jonathan McIntosh, *Hummer H2*, <http://www.capedmaskedandarmed.com/video/hummertruth.mov>.
73. Iman Foroutan, Zendanie Siasi, <http://www.democracyforiran.de/zendani256k.wmv>. 1 Alex Chan, *French Democracy* (French, 2005), <http://www.machinima.com/films.php?download=1407>.
74. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
75. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*.