

# The Private and the Public: Identity and Politics in Virtual Space

Nathanael Edward Bassett, bassn502@newschool.edu  
The School of Media Studies, The New School

Presented at Media In Transition 8, Cambridge, MA, May 5, 2013

## Abstract

When we think about identity, the medium through which we express, articulate and define that concept plays heavily into how it is understood. As society uses new mediums, that mediation becomes remediation, and consequently redefinition.<sup>1</sup> As the public sphere has become more " identity research has shifted focus to collective issues. This is due to concerns regarding group agency and politics, the means by which those definitions are created and maintained, and the freedom from physical proxemics due to new communications technologies.<sup>2</sup> Those developments foreshadowed the mainstream embrace of new media and social networks. The condition of virtual identity and community is now experience by a large public, interacting and existing through digital media. But how does that change the way we shape the community, and how it shapes us? Issues of the individual and the collective provide challenges to internet users and scholars alike. This work explores those issues, namely the question of how we resolve the online public sphere (or spheres) with our personal identities, and how we collaboratively construct recursive publics.

## Digital Redefinitions

The remediation of discourse to a digital medium redefines our concepts of identity. Bolter and Grusin make the claim that at present, all mediation is remediation. There is a recursive effect to this: television remakes itself in the image of the internet, film utilizes computer graphics, and "no medium, it seems, can now function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning."<sup>3</sup> Increased immediacy creates a sense that perceived inadequacies are being addressed through new mediums. As Bolter and Grusin write, "the rhetoric of remediation favors immediacy and transparency, even though as the medium matures it offers new opportunities for hypermediacy."<sup>4</sup> This reformation of the message extends to issues of politics and discourse, as "digital media promise to overcome representation." Old media represent a hierarchical structure of control, "while interactive media move the locus of control to the individual."<sup>5</sup> Recursive effects do not just apply to the content, but the users, both collectively and personally, and this is where we see the largest impact to collaborative self-construct of personal and collective identity.

### **Public, counterpublic, and private spheres**

This movement of control suggests increased agency on behalf of the individual, but scholars are quick to critique the measure of control afforded to individuals. Mark Poster attempts to apply the Habermasian model of the public sphere to virtual spaces, but is unable to resolve our definition of "public" with the methods of "electronically mediated communications."

For Habermas, the public sphere is a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims. This model, I contend, is systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics. We are advised then to abandon Habermas' concept of the public sphere in assessing the Internet as a political domain.<sup>6</sup>

Poster's contention is that mediations of this nature actually occur in private virtual spaces which bear few distinguishing features from private letters, but acknowledges that "political discourse has long been mediated by electronic machines." He writes that "critical theory has insisted on a public sphere" and labeled mediation as "interference." Constructions of technology

provide decentralized discourse, “unmonitorable conversations,” issues of private property (through “the infinite reproducibility of information”) and moral dilemmas which seemingly improve upon the public’s chances for democracy.<sup>7</sup> While there are new developments to each of those issues, today, we accept this role of technology in facilitating political discourse, so much so that these notions lend themselves to cyber-utopian fantasies<sup>8</sup> which ignore the issues of access, representation and commercialization.<sup>9</sup> Zizi Papacharissi offers these critiques, and expounds on Poster’s thoughts by asserting that “the virtual sphere holds a great deal of promise as a political medium,” through the use of internet activism and changing the method and nature of political discourse. However, before any meaningful analyses can be reached, “the content, diversity, and impact of political discussion need to be considered carefully before we conclude whether online discourse enhances democracy.”<sup>10</sup> In a later work, Papacharissi writes, “it becomes obvious that citizens go online to complement or substitute their uses of traditional communication and directly represent their opinions, when possible and necessary.”<sup>11</sup> Citing Stephen Coleman, she states that digital media provides a compromise of direct democracy with representation, supplemented with potential for subversive behavior, which do not revive the public sphere, but “inject a healthy dose of plurality to a maturing model of representative democracy”.<sup>12</sup> More to our point, this particular usage of electronically mediated communications reveal tensions in the way users express individual political identity. In light of this, Papacharissi proposes what she terms a “private sphere:”

Whereas in the truest iterations of democracy, the citizen was enabled through the public sphere, in contemporary democracy, the citizen acts politically from a private sphere of reflection, expression, and behavior. Within this private sphere, the citizen is alone, but not lonely or isolated. Connected, the citizen operates in a mode and with political language determined by him or her. Primarily still monitorial in orientation, the citizen is able to become an agonist of democracy, if needed, but in an atomized mode.<sup>13</sup>

### **Creating representative discursive spaces for participation**

Remediating discourse then raises powerful questions on how the new medium affects actors and their actions within that virtual space, as well as what the definitions of that space are. Issues of access become especially relevant when the benefits are understood, and how those alter levels of power by participating in the discursive process.<sup>14</sup> But participation is no guarantee of representation. In a case study of Belgian media products, Nico Carpentier points to several

issues of contemporary participatory media theory, the first of which is the discourse of novelty and technological determinism which accompanies cyber-utopianism. He also cites a lack of research on perspectives and receptions of mainstream and “regular” audiences. Carpentier contends that “the conflation of producer and audience is not total,” and that users who are not participators are not studied because of the focus on active audiences. We can also look to Livingstone’s distinction on this point, that regardless of subsequent behavior, the audience has multiple roles as interpreter and user.<sup>15</sup> Carpentier’s final issue is that the concept of participation is isolated from the associated factors of relevance, appreciation and significance. This decontextualization is important because it also reveals unresolved tensions of the digital medium:

As participatory media practices are not situated in a vacuum, one can for instance safely assume that these practices will be interpreted (and gain signification) through already circulating discourses on the societal roles of media organizations, their media professionals and their audiences; similarly, the expectations of what is to be considered personal, private, public and political, and of who has the right to express what under which conditions, affect these interpretations and evaluations<sup>16</sup>.

Dahlberg identifies two arguments on how the internet is perceived, as both a realm and method for political discourse. Dominant and hegemonic discourses are reproduced (or remediated) by issues of ownership and control, as well as the mere act of “being brought into online interaction by the (offline) subject positioning(s) of participants” (this principle of control over access discourse is expounded on by Van Dijk as an element of critical discourse analysis<sup>17</sup>). The opposing view of new media suggests that the Internet aids “marginalized groups” to create counter-publics: “‘alternative’ discursive arenas constituted by a number of participants engaging in debate and criticism that strengthens and develops oppositional discourses (identities, interpretations, social imaginaries and languages) to those dominating the mainstream public sphere.”<sup>18</sup> Michael Warner offers a deep insight into the relationship between these publics and counter-publics, stating that counterpublics “challenge modernity’s social hierarchy of faculties do so by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity, and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger-sociability.”<sup>19</sup> They form publics of their own:

Each of these is a similarly complex metatopical space for the circulation of discourse; each is a scene for developing oppositional interpretations of its members' identities, interests, and needs. They are structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless, the Internet enables the overcoming of physical and social boundaries to discover “shared points of identity” on behalf of these groups. Such new conceptions, when enabled by the community, may come into conflict with an individual's pre-existing identity developed through non-digital relationships.

Here we see a distinctive thread beginning to emerge, from Papacharissi's view of online mediation complementing or substitution to Dahlberg's offline subject positioning. There is a differentiation of behavior and identity for online and offline individuals. Without resolving the difficulties of defining the Internet as a public or private sphere, it is understood that the new medium introduces unique tensions and this oscillating perception of self — the offline versus online person. In both physical and digital environments, people form communities by which they define themselves. In applying Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics to the concept of virtual communities, Gary Burnett writes that such groups are defined by their individual histories of writing and reading, “a history documented by an ever-growing body of textual messages created by shifting populations of writers and interpreted by shifting populations of readers.” Once a text that helps define and constitute such a community is produced, “that text travels out into a digital world from which it cannot be recalled and within which it takes on a life of its own.”<sup>21</sup> A similar thought is expressed by the concept of ideographs within rhetoric. Ideographs, as termed by Michael Calvin McGee, are “virtue words” or everyday terms used in political discourse that works as “a high order abstraction representing commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal.”<sup>22</sup> We are collectively engaged in determining their meaning, yet are not responsible for the evolution after we make our contribution.

What we write and say online morphs into this redefinition of expression, in the same way juvenilia that escapes the grasp of an established author provides a retrospective counter to their public persona. In the process of maturation and growth, aspects of identity mediated through a virtual community leave a sometimes embarrassing image or a impression of ourselves which clash with our lives. But they also facilitate counterhegemonic discourses which could otherwise

be impossible. Warf and Grimes discuss the implications of this, referencing what is termed nomadic power. “Nomadic power is diffuse power, with no location, and it maintains its autonomy through movement. Its valuables, electronic capital and electronic information, are located both nowhere and everywhere and cannot be physically captured.” While it does not ensure that these counterhegemonic discourses will come to be, it facilitates the opening of these spaces where they can come to be.<sup>23</sup> The Critical Art Ensemble offers up a critique of this concept which applies Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome to the new media landscape: the open discursive space of the internet benefits the power elite more than any counterpublic or counterhegemonic group. While nomadic power remains elusive and provides decentralized and mobile tactics for subversive groups, it also inspires the “fortress ideology,” leading to the privatization of virtual spaces and “bunkers” resistant to the panic nomads inspire.<sup>24</sup> As nomads, we may feel alone, but we are ultimately seeking these loose communities which grant us a sense of political self-determination. However, we come up against virtual structures and organized agents representing the interests of power. Our virtual societies provide much of the sense of togetherness we feel need to constitute an online subculture.

## **Recursion**

The recursive effect mentioned earlier comes into play as we construct this sense of self and collective identity, through collaborative and personal efforts. On the concept of free software and open source technology, Christopher Kelty articulates his idea of the “recursive public” in this way:

A recursive public is a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives.<sup>25</sup>

Kelty does not intend for the recursive public to replace the public sphere, but to describe a particular type of public which is keenly self-aware, cognizant and dealing with “the ability to build, control, modify, and maintain the infrastructure that allows them to come into being in the first place” and also “constitutes their everyday practical commitments and the identities of the

participants as creative and autonomous individuals.”<sup>26</sup> The community of open source developers and free software advocates have similarities to the hacker community and people engaged in hack-styled activities. Network power is also exemplified by the participatory and horizontal structure of administration in these groups. As Kelty writes, “recursive publics respond to governance by directly engaging in, maintaining, and often modifying the infrastructure they seek.” This reorients their sense of power, knowledge and liberty, resulting in two key aspects Kelty defines as availability and adaptability, which range from open access and privacy as well as the modifiable and fluid nature of all they deal with.<sup>27</sup> Kelty situates this public on the internet specifically, because the values of being able to make, maintain and manipulate the structures of a discourse are layered down to their infrastructure,<sup>28</sup> to some degree a determinist assertion, but we can also see it as a remediation of the context engendering a specific style of discourse.

This recursive public benefits from a sort of collective intelligence. Kevin Kelly writes about the early “hive mind” that arises from digital mediation through the example of a 1991 computer conference, where an audience of 5,000 computer graphic experts collectively played a single game of Pong, controlling a paddle’s motions through group effort.<sup>29</sup> In a more similar example, Waffa Bilal allowed users to control a paintball gun over the internet as part of his art project, “Domestic Tension.” Some visitors to the site teamed together to form a “left-click brigade” which prevented others from aiming the gun by keeping it directed away from the artist.<sup>30</sup>

In some ways these reflect the early optimistic notions of Howard Rheingold's "Smart Mobs,"<sup>31</sup> but the recursive public is different. Individuals working with a collective power are still guided by the frameworks of their interaction - Kelly's group is only playing virtual pong after all, and Bilal's audience cannot do more than aim and shoot a paintball gun. Individuals in a recursive public have a great deal more latitude over not just the actions of the group, but its identity and purpose. As noted above, Helen Nissenbaum’s popular ontology was both both adopted by and imposed on hackers, as the transgressive deviants of the internet with a “protest” theme of behavior. The real difference between Kelty’s recursive public of open source and the “hacker” public, is *responsibility and agency to define and control their own social ontology*.

## The Network Society and Material Publics

Kelty's concept of how recursive publics have a reorientation of power echoes what we have already seen with regards to network power. This again brings us to the tension between a recursive public and other types of publics. As we have also seen, Manuel Castell's network society also emphasizes the self-determination of individuals and their importance to the larger society. In "The Power of Identity," Castell sees three forms of identity building; legitimizing, resistance, and project identity. Resistance identity creates forms of collective resistance against oppressive institutions and results in collectives of people with communal stakes, but project identity develops from this communal resistance:

Subjects are not individuals, even if they are made by and in individuals. They are the collective social actor through which individuals reach holistic meaning in their experience. In this case, the building of identity is a project of a different life, perhaps on the basis of an oppressed identity, but expanding toward the transformation of society as the prolongation of this project of identity, as in the above-mentioned example of a post-patriarchal society, liberating women, men, and children, through the realization of women's identity... The rise of the network society calls into question the processes of the construction of identity during that period, thus inducing new forms of social change. This is because the network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social groups.<sup>32</sup>

In Castell's view, the network society changes the social construction of subjects, namely that they "are not built any longer on the basis of civil societies, which are in the process of disintegration, but as prolongation of communal resistance," making project identity, a reflexive and collaborative process deeply concerned with relations and resistance.

Organizing a network society around technics emphasizes those tensions between the society that created them and the types of communities they may be engendering. Hands points to this thread of determinism in a post-marxist analysis of how technology relates to activism against hegemony.<sup>33</sup> This tension is important, because as we have seen, so far all of these ideas have been framed around technology - even hackathon participants, while in a physical space, are concerned with how they can use varying forms of technology collaboratively to satisfy their individual stakes and reach communal goals. Noortie Marres provides the idea of a material public as publics drawn together by material participation, organized around objects. This attention to object-centered conceptions of public engagement recognizes that "communities of the effected" (resistance identities in Castell's terms or possibly counterpublics) are comprised of



members who “have too few things in common for them to cohere as a public.”<sup>34</sup>

Marres points to Dewey and Lippman’s formative and influential belief that “this public should be understood as an inherently problematic formation.” A return to classical American pragmatic conceptions of the public would acknowledge that “material dynamics of problematization must be understood as constitutive of the very process of the public’s formation” and an “‘environmentalization’ of the public”, where “participation in the public comes about through material practices, which render actors complicit in harmful effects that are distributed in time and in space” These material publics leave their mark contextually. The view of material participation is an attempt to account for otherwise possibly weak, object-oriented publics with ontological problems.<sup>35</sup>

We may be able to better understand network society’s project identities and how these groups form a public if we look at a broader picture of “virtual society,” through some of the literature on online community and society.

## Virtual Societies

The essence of virtual society has evolved from early groups of small users using highly specialized knowledge to the mainstream adoption that we experience today, but divides still exist between various groups by nature of structural filters and our arbitrary networks formed through digital media. Even on Twitter, segregated networks emerge which divide the common medium along racial<sup>36</sup> and ideological<sup>37</sup> lines. They are formed by the belief or identity of its members, which is transposed to the group. This furthers the concept of a private sphere, in which users determine the radial distance of our relationships. Rather than the “global village” of McLuhan,<sup>38</sup> participants are members of villages within towns within cities, the boundaries of which are unclear and interlaid within one another, yet subject to larger structural restrictions, whether imposed by the architecture of the medium or the positioning of participants prior to online interaction (as Dahlberg noted). We can envision these villages, or spheres, as being located within and against each other, nested, creating friction and tension at the boundaries. We can broadly examine three basic structures for online societies - societies of anonymity,

oppositional societies, and those in the “virtual commons.”

### **Societies of anonymity**

Much of the concern with private/public online societies is usually structured through the condition of anonymity or the lack thereof. It's worth then to see how this state affects the behavior of individuals and their community. A recent dissertation by Na'ama Nagar examines the phenomenon of commenting on news articles, which creates a potential for users to interact with the authors and express their personal opinions in a public venue. In the examples studied, anonymity was optional as many could self-identify or use pseudonyms, yet the process of registration and maintaining a user profile encouraged a sense of accountability to user comments.<sup>39</sup> Nagar's hypothesis that identification increases the quality of opinions expressed in comments comes in the light of a wide body of literature discussing how behavior changes online, and a thorough study reveals how communities surrounding British and Israeli news organizations respond to published items.

First and foremost, the empirical results demonstrate that higher levels of identification enhance the quality of comments. Registration and user profiles seem to diminish users' perceptions of anonymity and function as quality control mechanisms that encourage communicative discipline and elevate the level of discourse. In the Guardian and the Daily Mail, two news sites that employ such mechanisms, the percentage of users that offered argumentation was significantly higher than those in Israeli news sites where most of the users are fully anonymous.<sup>40</sup>

Such findings would fall in line the belief that anonymity encourages anti-social behavior. Randy Zuckerman, Facebook's marketing director, made the statement that anonymity should “go away” because “people behave a lot better when they have their real names down.”<sup>41</sup> Nagar's work would seem to correlate this belief, but fails to account for a legitimate need for privacy from political activists, socially marginalized groups, or individuals with secrets to share.

There exists important work of self-identification and ideological revelation for those engaged in anonymous discursive spaces. Haibin Dong examines the way anonymous interaction aids these in-group/out-group conflicts of ideology to resolution through a discursive analysis. Necessary for intercultural understanding, conversations about ideology are related to identity discussions, which Dong explains “can be collectively and truthfully revealed by the discursive messages naturally coming out of in-group members with minimum outside constraints.”<sup>42</sup> With

regards to how discourse analysis applies to chat environments, Gazi Islam writes that we see the adoption of nicknames or “webnames,” which offer a “distinct identity” that “promotes the maintenance of two distinct and oppositional ‘worlds’, thereby promoting the integrity of the chat room as an autonomous sphere of action.”<sup>43</sup>

We can also see the necessity of this separate oppositional world in the phenomenon of online confessionals. PostSecret is one such site which operates off the unique medium such messages take. Users mail in postcards containing secrets they want to share with others anonymously. Anna Polleti writes how “the holders of the secrets have made and shared them in such a way that anonymity is protected, but the texts they have produced are powerfully connected to some body through the materiality of the postcard.”<sup>44</sup> Natalia Rybas provides a semiotic analysis of these postcards and finds that the postcards transmit individual feelings and concerns to the rest of the community, which resonates with community: “The individuals find courage to point at the discrepancies and issues in their lives, and the stories echo with audience and other contributors.”<sup>45</sup> Peggy Wood also examines PostSecret and the users who engage with it as taking part in a redemptive process:

...since time immemorial, confession is an important part of our lives . This is especially true in these times of increased perturbation wherein mediated exposure to clashing value systems and other upheavals is almost inescapable. Given these circumstances and the desire to make use of innovative technologies, PostSecret has emerged as an important site of confession. This is true not only for people who confess their secrets, but for the millions who ritualistically read and discuss those secrets weekly.<sup>46</sup>

To relate this to political identity, we can easily imagine how the discursive space of the Internet potentially brings together conflicting ideologies and identities, resulting in the “friction of spheres” discussed earlier. It is unlikely that users will be able to resolve these tensions without some safe mode of expression and reflection. The confessional mode of these environments invite individuals to experience and share perspectives, offering them a broader sense of collective identity. On Facebook and other social media, our identities are becoming more and more tied to our virtual behavior in the digital commons through an effort to improve accountability. This removes that safe space where we can be open and vulnerable without fear of reprisal. Eliminating anonymity is problematic, leveraging the interests of some governmental

or corporate oversight (in a publicly monitored environment like the internet, or its privatized subsets like Facebook) against the interests of individuals who may use anonymity to protect themselves.

The most popular and best-known example of a society of anonymity is probably Anonymous, whose namesake largely defines the group's behavior and qualities. Anonymous is both a society defined by its fundamental quality of privacy, and its oppositional nature. While the politics of Anonymous clearly place them at odds with institutional oversight, it is a small part of their overall motivations and identity.<sup>47,48</sup> Hacker groups in general are at a disadvantage, and anonymity partially serves to resolve the handicap. As Gabriella Coleman writes,

Governments and corporations have more power and resources to take technology down a certain path than initiatives brought by citizens have. Attempts, for instance, to create alternatives to corporate social media applications may ultimately fail. The short history of geek and hacker politics, however, demonstrates that some of their responses and interventions have already shifted the political possibilities in the realm of law and technology and have also acted as a gateway, politicizing actors to engage in actions outside of the technological realm.<sup>49</sup>

### **Oppositional societies**

Virtual society is typically contrasted against the physical relationships which precede it, as a replacement rather than an augmentation. Robert Putnam's influential *Bowling Alone* takes an early balanced view of virtual community, with some correlation between civic disengagement and the rise of these digital replacements. Foreseeing belief and identity segregation, Putnam sees online communities as being interest-based, rather than place-based. While "real world interactions often force us to deal with diversity,"<sup>50</sup> communities determined by commonalities of identity and interest lead to a degree of "cyberbalkanization." Tailoring what users see to their preferences, filtering technologies also increase homogeneity, foreshadowing concerns over "The Daily Me"<sup>51</sup> and what we now call echochambers. But Putnam's sense of balance comes from a realization that such trends "will depend in large part on how the 'virtual' facet of our lives fits into our broader social reality, as well as our fundamental values."<sup>52</sup> Putnam leaves the issue as something that remains to be seen, if the Internet will be a "niftier telephone" which reinforced

existing personal networks, or a “niftier television” (which he subjects to its own degree of intense criticism). We can see how this may effect online identity, which remains unresolved in Putnam’s work - he asserts that “anonymity and fluidity in the virtual world encourage ‘easy in, easy out,’ ‘drive-by’ relationships,” which appeals to “some denizens of cyberspace” while hindering the social capital.<sup>53</sup> Putnam’s concern is with the nature of potential virtual communities but not its atomized members, and this is merely a starting point to understand what the groups themselves look like in comparison to their non-virtual counterparts. That attitude encourages a schism between “real life” and online activity.

Such schisms are sometimes amplified by the collective identity of the virtual communities created by users. Adams and Roscigno explore the oppositional culture of white supremacy groups with a focus their framing techniques as well as identity construction and maintenance. Marginalized by society, they capitalize on the semantic weight of key terms, which articulate deep and meaningful connotations for the collective identity. Ideological framing both constructs identity and motivates the organizational structure of the group.<sup>54</sup> In a similar study of virtual communities based on racist rhetoric, Brown examines the discourse of white supremacy and its rise due to the ease, availability, and cost-effectiveness. The construction of black identity (“virtually unchanged” from the days of slavery) mirrors that of white identity, constructed through difference - not outside of it.<sup>55</sup> These hate groups benefit from the relative anonymity of a virtual community, which helps to validate and sustain racist ideologies. But they are created from pre-existing communities, who found the internet could facilitate their internal discourse while providing a platform to promote their message. This means of determining identity versus an “other” is also found in Bart Cammaerts’s study of online discourses among right-wing Belgian communities.<sup>56</sup> For these counterpublics, individual and collective identity is created through opposition - similar to Castell’s concept of “resistance identity.”

An early study by Winter and Huff examines a forum of women computer scientists, who identify issues with the way women experience an “uninviting culture” of electronic communication. They report experiencing sexual harassment, exclusion, and hostility in the face of a male dominated internet culture. To this end, they form the “Systers,” a gender-segregated internet forum which provides an “understanding,” “safe” and receptive community,

counteracting the effectively hegemonic nature of other virtual spaces. Mixed sex forums “required them to either adopt the competitive, confrontational style of that forum or not to play at all,”<sup>57</sup> mimicking real world patterns of gender based communication. Winter and Huff’s piece is important because it recognizes the plurality of communities through the varieties of electronic forums, each with differing styles and “flavors.” The logical extreme of this echoes some of the concerns referenced by Putnam, with “ghettos” replacing the “global village” model. Such concerns assume that people engage with only one group, focused around one aspect of their identity. Putnam references Paul Resnick in suggesting that both extremes are wrong, stating “weak ties that bridge among distinct groups might create an interwoven community of communities.”<sup>58</sup> The way in which our own personal identities are comprised of many layers is reflected here, even through a focus on community identity. The concept of weak ties is important though, and a key point to understanding effective collective identity - we will return to this.

It is difficult to peel away the many layers between interwoven communities which build up individual identity, in order to differentiate between personal identity inside a virtual community, or communal identity comprised of various individuals. Tyler Branson examines the Tea Party’s ideological focus associated with “radical individualism” and how it seems to contrast internal warnings against debate and differing points of view. He determines the Tea Party movement “embodies a form of digital populism” using “populist rhetorical frameworks in an online environment to construct a narrative about the role of technology in society as liberatory, transformative, and essential to reaching and sustaining its rhetorical goals.”<sup>59</sup> The conflicts that arise between members who wish to remain decentralized/grassroots versus those who tie themselves to political candidates underline attempts to establish a collective identity more closely related to their use of new media. Similar examinations of the public sphere made here are also in Branson’s research, who ultimately makes the argument that “the Tea Party is a distinct site where issues of populism, technology, and democracy are being performed, understood, and contested, constructing a particular narrative about the role of technology in society.”<sup>60</sup> The Tea Party can certainly be understood as a collective or resistance identity emerging in opposition to an ideological other, particularly as Branson notes Tea Party Nation’s

social networking site described itself as “...for principled, patriotic debate and organization against liberal ideology and agenda.”<sup>61</sup> But not every society of members organized around a particular shared point need be oppositional with such a defiant spirit. Patrick Eisenlohr examines the positive ethnic and cultural identity of online communities focused around preserving languages. He notes that these exchanges “may give rise to forms of sociality of their own, independent from those sustained by any empirical revival of a lesser-used language,”<sup>62</sup> a positive outcome for communities which would otherwise be lost to homogenization.

### **The virtual commons**

These counterhegemonic discourses or counterpublics constitute a new discursive space where shared points of identity are the center of their sphere. However, most of us engage with others by forming our own social networks across a more diverse platform and less specific platform. Andrew Chadwick describes more general-purpose virtual societies, like Facebook, as “third places,” apart from home or workplace, where “individuals express many different facets of their identities and in which diverse lifestyles and values play out.” Political life is accompanied by the everyday minutia, where it “aligns itself with broader repertoires of self-expression and lifestyle values.”<sup>63</sup> The semi-public spaces of walls and pages allow for small conversations on these topics as part of the day-to-day lives of the user. Chadwick calls for more empirical research into “e-democracy” as he terms it, particularly with respect to the distribution of political power to individuals:

Granular online engagement implies a diffusion of power, though this is a matter for empirical exploration and it requires rethinking a range of firmly embedded assumptions about representation and the role of intermediaries in liberal democratic political practice. As I argued earlier in this paper, unseating the deliberative assumption does not require that we also unseat the assumption of a politically-motivated citizenry.<sup>64</sup>

These spaces present difficulties in identity expression, particularly when they recreate hegemonic dominant cultural ideologies. Shayla Stern examines this in the context of female adolescent use of MySpace, noting it is not a “post-feminist safe space,” yet it allows them a certain agency and freedom. While the public behavior of young women play into those “dominant patriarchal discourses,” Stern writes that we should see “the act of using technology

to play and experiment with identity as empowering.”<sup>65</sup>

Girls’ increased awareness of sexuality and increased willingness to discuss it publicly and acknowledge sex as a part of their lives in IM and in online forums may suggest not only a healthy knowledge of sexuality and the body that has not always been present in the lives of adolescent girls, but also a willingness to better understand the physical and emotional ramifications of sex. Negotiation of sexual identity online is often tied into the performance of feminine gender (as a binary opposite to masculine gender) and how patriarchal discourses displace healthy conversation about sexuality between girls and boys.<sup>66</sup>

Though Stern doesn’t examine it, it would seem that social media and the Internet in general facilitates this awareness building and conversation of subjects where the afforded privacy of the medium encourages growth and development. Issues which are otherwise taboo or potentially embarrassing, socially unacceptable or discouraged (such as sexual identity) become more explorable from fewer personal restrictions.

The problem with these public spaces is that they are not truly public. Cass Sunstein makes the argument that filtering technology removes the truly public forum, where we would encounter those with ideas unlike our own. By selectively choosing what we experience online, the commons are no longer a place for honestly diverse views and ideas.<sup>67</sup> But we can also look to the concept of the virtual commons as a massive swath of privately owned public spaces - open fields where traditional ideas about rights to free speech, dissent and debate, no longer truly apply unless they are in the Terms of Service. This also impacts the way a user perceives their role as an individual and a member of a group. General purpose societies may not be the place to stand on soapboxes for our ideas, but they are where we can make an everyday performance of our identities.

### **Community versus custodianship**

The information we get from “awareness building” is more readily available. Gatekeepers of knowledge in a virtual society are translucent - what they offer passes readily through the medium but the nature of their authorship is obscured. Alan Liu provides an overview of the transformation from an “age of authors” to an “age of friends,” as mediums transform from where we are all custodians of different sets of knowledge. The moment of Web 2.0 arose, he writes, when developers recognized the potential of “bidirectionality” - writing content into the



network, allowing users to becoming authors themselves, and with this, developed a sense of community among people online.

And with this mention of community, we come to the true significance of Web 2.0. “Architecture,” “form,” “genre,” “topoi,” “trope,” and their like may be too stiff a way to describe what Web 2.0 really set loose. Such conventions express, but barely contain, the great phenomenon of Web 2.0: social computing, which can be defined most generally as “the use of technology in networked communication systems by communities of people for one or more goals,” where the goal may be as basic as just working on one’s identity (for example, polishing one’s profile page), communing with “friends,” or shaping the collective identity or mission of an online group. The signature feature of Web 2.0, in short, is the migration of social experience—whether for reasons of identity, play, or work—into the network. In its now standard slogans, Web 2.0 is “crowdsourcing,” “the rule of many,” “the wisdom of the crowd,” “hive mind,” etc. It is the reorganization of one-to-many and many-to-one communications under a new hegemony of many-to-many collaboration epitomized in the increasing proportion of daily life spent updating blogs, Facebook pages, and so on.<sup>68</sup>

Liu sees this transformation of community authorship as at odds with conceptions of history in the traditional sense. Instead, we ought to preserve the former as a complementation to what we have now - a basis for comparison and a way augment what we build together in the future.

Such transformations imply a radical transformation to society that is, in every sense of the word, democratic. Yet we have yet to really uncover how this applies to our politics. Philip Howard offers up a critique, recognizing the way in which we are more capable of having greater group expression with less actual engagement into the existing political process. Increasingly rapid changes means this 2005 work should be seen in the context of early attempts by political campaigns to integrate supporters to candidate races. Howard recognizes the significance of what he terms “shared text,” yet he still sees a need for some sense of professional curation and management, writing that “journalists have a key role in editing content on behalf of the public.”<sup>69</sup> There is a casual, brief concern over the loss of a “random” experience of information. Howard is concerned those who tailor content to their interests will not be exposed to new ideas, consciously aware of the echo-chamber effect without referencing it as such. He notes the way in which digital media makes it possible for campaigns to create highly focused personal messages or advertisements to constituents (a marketing strategy also known as long-tail nano-targeting<sup>70</sup>).

If we take Howard’s view of news consumption as the mainstream vehicle of politics for the public, and by extension the traditional view of journalism as the “fourth estate,” it leaves a

limited idea of what increased individual agency means for personal political identity. One is the ability of readers and viewers to comment on the work of news organizations. Anstead and O'Loughlin examine how this happens in real time for BBC Question Time, a political debate program where viewers can offer input through Twitter messages. They term the phenomenon of viewership commenting as “the emergence of the viewertariat,” which is comprised of “viewers who use online publishing platforms and social tools to interpret, publicly comment on, and debate a television broadcast while they are watching it.”<sup>71</sup> The viewertariat establishes a collective identity through its behavior and the content of its tweets, in this case coming out against the guest panelist Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party. However, the amorphous nature of a participatory digital body with collective identity leads to tensions when others try to determine “public opinion” (a troublesome idea itself<sup>72</sup>) off of the broad opinions and behavior of the viewertariat.<sup>73</sup>

This final issue of community and custodianship echoes back to the tensions between representation and participation. The agency of the group members here define how recursive the groups are, and to what degree people are invested in the community. Greater agency means a type of collectivity which is less homogenous, more flexible, and open to participation. People do not merely affiliate with the group - they are directly responsible for how it operates and the way it is perceived by others. This leads us to the crisis we have experienced between the “private and the public.”

## **Personal/Individualist Identity Crises**

The question of online identity typically provokes us to think of people on some a solitary journey, and we are often concerned with an individualist perspective of online identity. Nathan Heller has described how we associate a state of being alone as inevitably linked to changes in technology, which possibly disconnect us from each other while augmenting the relationships we still have.<sup>74</sup> This line of thinking follows the work of Sherry Turkle, whose foundational work *Life on the Screen* suggested multiple personae for the single self in virtual environments could be therapeutic.<sup>75</sup> Jooan Kim draws from Heidegger to term the amalgamation of these

activities, personae and aspects as “Digi-sein as being-in-the-World-Wide-Web.”<sup>76</sup> And this fracturing, or assembly from many pieces follows the work of Stuart Hall, who favors “identification” over identity, as it “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.”<sup>77</sup>

Later work by Turkle suggested that we did not fully understand the complex “identity effects” of such activities of play. Adoption of an online personae can be liberating from some, uncomfortably “fragmenting” for others.<sup>78</sup> Cyberspace directly reflects the absence of an ego in terms of decentralized identity. “In cyberspace, identity was fluid and multiple, a signifier no longer clearly points to a thing that is signified, and understanding is less likely to proceed through analysis than by navigation through virtual space.”<sup>79</sup> Turkle sees children as more adapted to this fluidity - but in the past decade Turkle feels that those virtual interactions have taken the place of and fail to supplement interpersonal interactions.<sup>80</sup> Excessive interconnectedness has removed us from reflective isolation to continual fluidity. Turkle explores this further in *Alone Together*, where she states that her old metaphor of the computer providing “a mirror of mind” was inadequate, and that “our new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology.”<sup>81</sup> There is a new conception of time from interconnectedness, and as we are always connected, we watch our lives “scroll by” as observers.<sup>82</sup> This leads to an “anxiety of always” - life online never ends or pauses, and the Internet is always on. Someone is always up and everything we do is on record somehow. “The idea of the moratorium does not easily mesh with a life that generates its own electronic shadow.”<sup>83</sup> These legitimate concerns explain Turkle’s decreased optimism for the way digital mediation affects identity. Particularly troublesome is the way that this effects political speech. She relates the way an eighteen-year-old feels about this: “It [the Internet] definitely makes you think about going to a protest or something. There would be so many cameras. You can’t tell where the pictures could show up.”<sup>84</sup> The privacy of politics is impacted by the social media creates a sense of panopticon. Relinquishing your privacy to social media means that one almost expects anonymous governmental agencies to be monitoring all their online activity. Because our online behaviors are associated with our “real life” person, we have a reflexive sense of anxiety about political

action.

Turkle's original work in examining online identity was associated with MUDs, also the location of a virtual rape which had an impact on cyberspace literature through its documentation by Jullian Dibbell.<sup>85</sup> While the events surrounding that rape and Dibbell's record of it seem to describe a second world, his later work, *Play Money*, took for granted that such a second life could persist - but not in the mirror fashion that Turkle originally saw. Instead, as Shaviro writes, we take for granted "the inseparability of these two lives; they don't compete, but intertwine with one another. The life of the character on the computer screen is simply a part of the everyday life of the person sitting in front of the screen."<sup>86</sup> Even something as terrible as rape is remediated from virtual representations to disturbing embodiments, as Jennifer Lynn Gossett and Sarah Byrne demonstrate in a content analysis of sites dedicated to the act.<sup>87</sup> And the anonymous new media artwork "Mouchette" invites users to play with our ambivalence towards violent behavior in virtual spaces, by attempting to attach emotionality to otherwise causal attempts to rape and main the artist's avatar.<sup>88</sup> Again, it would seem Zuckerberg is correct - we act as ourselves unleashed and are only responsible if we can be accountable. But this solution presumes that all anonymous behavior is deviant behavior, or that political deviance is on the same level as sexual deviance and assault. As noted before, individuals need a safe space to resolve frictions between differing ideologies and identities.

A study by Mesch and Beker find that norms of offline self-disclosure weakly adhere to self-disclosure online, but that adolescents had different norms from other age groups.<sup>89</sup> These "cyborg babies" as Turkle termed them,<sup>90</sup> are developing new norms, according to one theoretical approach.<sup>91</sup> Brian Wilson notes though, how there is a need for more literature on the flow of online-offline culture, particularly among youth.<sup>92</sup> These point to a oscillation of private and public politics - the adoption of casual versus sincere cosmopolitanism<sup>93</sup> versus the panopticon-like outlook of the youth Turkle refers to, and the stripping of anonymity by social media services and tech companies. Interacting with and within spheres of counterhegemonic discourse contributes to the depth and quality of a democracy. Nah, Veenstra, and Shah studied the way these virtual communities and outlets contribute to participatory political action.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, they have a similar effect for global issues, transcending physical boundaries<sup>95</sup> for

uniquely cosmopolitan identities. But how can we feel free to take part in these groups with the fear of monitoring? Seth Kreimer examines the legality surrounding such issues of communities of social protest taking their message online with the stark observation that “Visibility entails vulnerability.” As he writes, “Activities that might escape notice of opponents on the ground become the potential subjects of countermeasures once they take to the Internet.”<sup>96</sup>

Again, we begin to see an increasing departure from the conception of the virtual as an “other” - geography of digital media is now overlaid on the physical, and mobile technology (particularly augmented reality) encourage us to consider both as one. A recent piece by Michael Lind directly tells readers to “Stop Pretending Cyberspace Exists,”<sup>97</sup> breaking down the imaginary otherworldliness of a virtual space. Users are users, and they only really exist wherever they are sitting down to use a computer. By this logic, no one is actually on Facebook, people aren’t in anything when they play games together online. These things only exist on servers, in physical locations, and our experiences interacting with them are then some strange parasocial event. The political implications of this bode well for governments seeking a handle on otherwise abstract threats on a screen. But the loss of privacy to our virtual shadow makes us self-conscious. The concept of continuous monitoring or persistently referenced behavior, where anything we do can and will be recorded and recited if necessary, extends from any imagination of cyberspace to all of our behaviors as the two become more integrated. If privacy and anonymity disappears from the internet, and our behaviors online and off become effectively synonymous, we become completely public individuals, with no retreat.

This crystallization of the digital-persona (or Kim’s “Digi-sens”) means there is a need for new directions in internet identity research, as noted by Helen Kennedy. We must consider the debates occurring within cultural studies, “such as affect, identification, nomadic practice, ‘as-if’ and becoming,” and if “these might open up new insights and allow for new conceptual developments within internet identity research in particular, and new media research in general.”<sup>98</sup> Kennedy is particular aware of the problems the old conception of anonymity and fragmentation pose to internet identity research, stating that the concept is “too fixed and stable to allow for recognition of the differences between being anonymous and feeling anonymous.” A binary between individual anonymity or public individuals creates a tension hiding the honest

need for anonymity when we live in the panopticon of social media. As a consequence,  
“...the being/feeling relationship is fixed: being and feeling are locked together in a way that limits exploration of the significant differences between them and what these differences might reveal about the simultaneously public and private character of the internet.”<sup>99</sup>

In addition, reflecting on the stark departure from virtual as an “other” is not meant to advocating a view of online/offline identity and space as total asynchronous and separate realities. Nathan Jurgenson terms this position as one of “digital dualism,” that the physical and the digital are two separate things which do not interact. As an alternative, he offers the concept of “augmented reality,” that digital and physical things interact and are part of the same reality.<sup>100</sup> Stéphane Vial articulates the sameness of reality - it is the singular self, singular world we experience through the virtual. The expressions of it are different because our “being-in-the-world” is dependent on ontophanic conditions which construct it. Changing phenomenotechniques create the impression of a difference, but we are changing along with those phenomenotechniques.<sup>101</sup> Our virtual identities are merely another aspect of our singular selves, part of the multiplicity of identities we utilize throughout our lives, tied to various roles, contexts, times, and relationships. It is then best to understand virtual spaces, communities and identities as all resulting out of the efforts of people and not merely their context - again, technology does not change the world, but people who use technology do.

This focus on congruency or singularity to personal identity shows how the individual is no longer a weak assemblage of multiple identities scattered across various accounts. Popular perspectives are moving to a “strong” concept of the individual. The central aspect of anonymity is abandoned to public profiles, with real names. We engage in lifelogging, self-quantification and post this for all to see. The perspective of strong individualism promotes integration, the single identity, but also a sense of alienation or isolation, as part of the disorientation from changing phenomenotechniques.

## **Public/Collective Identity Crises**

Just as the concept of personal identity is shifting, collective identity is changing as well. But

this is moving from a “strong” to a “weak” perspective. The strong collective is a monolith, particularly when we apply this view to groups like Anonymous. The mob can be manipulated or led. It has two behaviors, goose-stepping or swarming. It is about cooperation through compliancy. This is how we view traditionally view collectivity, as individuals who are obedient to dictating leaders, ideas, or rules. These hierarchies still do not reflect the network society and a truly horizontal collective, and so they reveal themselves as inadequate to address online publics where participants are invested and concerned with representation.

Chris Kelty’s recursive public provides a good framework for imaging how strong individuals with greater personal agency contribute to their publics and cocreate a sense of collective identity. Again, it actively develops alternatives to existing models of power and improves itself because of the conscience involvement of its participants. All are keenly aware of the role they play together, and are therefore bound together, not through obedience, but by mutual reflection and communal goals.<sup>102</sup>

These publics reflect the sort of “weak ties” that Mark Granovetter described in his work on social network theory.<sup>103</sup> Weak ties make a collective more flexible and persistent. While the mob dissipates once the riot is finished, the weak collective persists. Strong ties result in rigid conformity that shatters when an authority (whether this is leader, an idea, or a protocol) is deposed, but weak ties enable the group to articulate its own identity, motivations and agenda.

The recursion between individual and the group means that while individuals are contributing to and helping to form those communal characteristics, they are also being informed by the features of the group itself. A participant informs the collective identity, and the collective informs the participant’s own individual identity. This feature corresponds with the nested spheres or publics in which we all reside. The greater our agency or individual autonomy as participants of a public, the more recursion works as a feature of that collective. This would help people to determine what publics are most important and worth the investment.

Lastly, the effect of media democratization to increase agency and produce greater recursion/collectivity leads to publics which are “more public.” By this I mean, the publics we participate in are more diversified and heterogeneous. Distributed authorship produces a collaborative type of collectivity in the recursive public. The weak collective perspective may be helpful for

understanding not only the the new virtual societies as they arise, but societies in general, as they are augmented by digital media, and the roles that individuals play in them.

## Conclusions

Work on identity and digital mediation has gone beyond experimenting with identity and adopting of different personae, to the identification of our online activity as part of a real self - an “electronic shadow” as Turkle called it, mimicking our actions and appearance. The record of this facsimile is a traceable and ever-present reminder of the decisions we made and the things we said, with multimedia evidence to prove it. Such an unforgiving account leaves little desire for honest exploration of sensitive topics, which is why we look for anonymous means to do so (as in the case of PostSecret). There is a wealth of possibility for engaging in identity politics, learning and attempting to resolve the tensions of ideology in the discursive space of the Internet. Yet we hesitate to make the wrong move.

Not only this, but OccupyWallStreet and open data / open government movements highlight issues of collective identity. Individuals help to inform the group on its collective identity, and that in turn informs them on aspects of their own identity. These collectives, constituting counterpublics and private spheres, connect with one another, their edges overlapping and sometimes crashing. To understand the friction of these spheres, with oppositional value systems, identity and ideology mediated through the discursive space on the internet, they must be studied and understood using this new body of terms and work. Likewise, network society and nomadic power are key antagonists to traditional hegemonic, hierarchical power, and they way that individuals collaborate and collectively define their stakes and motivations is a key means of understanding the new counterpublics. The new collective identity is coconstructed by participants to create a sense of collective society, and heterogeneous selves. Using a recursive model of the relationship between publics and individuals may be helpful to answering these problems in the network society.



## Notes

1. Bolter, J David, and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), 44-50.
2. Cerulo, K.A, "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* (1997): 385–386.
3. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 55.
4. Hypermediacy is the tension of visual space, organized and composed according to the needs of medium. It is what reminds us what we are looking at is mediated, rather than immediate. *Ibid.* 41
5. *Ibid.*, 60.
6. Poster, Mark, "Cyberdemocracy: the Internet and the Public Sphere." In *Internet Culture*, David Porter ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997): 265.
7. *Ibid.*, 266
8. Morozov, Evgeny, *The Net Delusion: the Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011): 1-21.
9. Papacharissi, Zizi, "The Virtual Sphere: the Internet as a Public Sphere." *New Media & Society* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 9–27.
10. *Ibid.* 18
11. Papacharissi, Zizi, "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: the Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond." In *The Handbook of Internet Politics*, Philip Howard and Andrew Chadwick ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 230–245.
12. *Ibid.* 241
13. *Ibid.* 244.
14. Van Dijk, T.A, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse & Society* 4, no. 2 (1993): 255–257.
15. Livingstone, Sonia, "The Challenge of Changing Audiences: or, What Is the Audience Researcher to Do in the Age of the Internet?." *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 75–86.
16. Carpentier, Nico, "Participation Is Not Enough: the Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices." *European Journal of Communication* 24, no. 4 (November 6, 2009): 412.
17. Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis."
18. Dahlberg, Lincoln, "The Internet, Deliberative Democracy, and Power: Radicalizing the Public Sphere." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 3, no. 1 (2007): 56.
19. Warner, Michael, "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14 (January 2002): 87.
20. *Ibid.* 86.
21. Burnett, G, "The Scattered Members of an Invisible Republic: Virtual Communities and Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics." *The Library Quarterly* (2002): 168.
22. McGee, M.C, "The 'Ideograph': a Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 1–16.
23. Warf, B., and J. Grimes, "Counterhegemonic Discourses and the Internet." *Geographical Review* 87, no. 2 (1997): 269- 270
24. Critical Art Ensemble, "Nomadic Power and Cultural Resistance." In *New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, 781–790. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003)
25. Kelty, Christopher M. *Two Bits*. (Durham: Duke University Press Books), 2008. 3.

26. Ibid. 4-16.
27. Ibid. 29-30.
28. Ibid. 50-60.
29. Kelly, Kevin. *Out of Control*. (New York: Basic Books) 1995. <http://www.kk.org/outofcontrol/contents.php>.
30. Bilal, Wafaa, and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot an Iraqi*. (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers), 2008.
31. Rheingold, Howard. *Smart Mobs*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2002.
32. Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 10-11.
33. Hands, Joss. *@ Is for Activism*. 23-47.
34. Marres, Noortje. *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. 27.
35. Ibid. 42-43.
36. "Segregation in the Social Web?" Akhila Kolisetty, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://akhilak.com/blog/2011/06/01/segregation-in-the-social-web/>
37. "The Partisan Internet and the Wider World." Ethan Zuckerman, accessed April 17, 2012. <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2010/05/24/the-partisan-internet-and-the-wider-world/>
38. McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 5
39. Nagar, Na'ama. "The Loud Public: the Case of User Comments in Online News Media." (PhD diss. University at Albany, SUNY, 2011). 81.
40. Ibid. 101.
41. "Randi Zuckerberg Runs in the Wrong Direction on Pseudonymity Online." Electronic Frontier Foundation. August 2, 2011, accessed May 3, 2012. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/08/randi-zuckerberg-runs-wrong-direction-pseudonymity>
42. Dong, Haibin, "Identity Discussion: a Discourse Analysis of the Ingroup Identity Differences Enacted by One Thread of Online Discussions." *China Media Relations* 5, no. 2 (2009): 20.
43. Islam, Gazi, "Virtual Speakers, Virtual Audiences: Agency, Audience and Constraint in an Online Chat Community." *Dialectical Anthropology* 30, no. 1 (2006): 75.
44. Poletti, Anna, "Intimate Economies: PostSecret and the Affect of Confession." *Biography* 34 (April 9, 2011): 31-32. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.
45. Rybas, Natalia, "Attempting to Reveal the Secret: a Semiotic Analysis of Postcards in the PostSecret Project." *National Communication Association*. 2008. 22.
46. Wood, Peggi, "Post Secrets From the Edge: Guilt, Shame and Redemption." *National Communication Association* 2009. 25.
47. Coleman, E Gabriella. "Our Weirdness Is Free." *Triple Canopy*, no. 15 (January 2012). [http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our\\_weirdness\\_is\\_free](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our_weirdness_is_free).
48. Coleman, E Gabriella, and Alex Golub. "Hacker Practice Moral Genres and the Cultural Articulation of Liberalism." *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 3 (2008): 255-277.
49. Coleman, G. "Hacker Politics and Publics." *Public Culture* 23, no. 3 (November 16, 2011): 515.
50. Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001) 178.
51. Sunstein, Cass R. *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton University Press, (2009). 1-18
52. Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. 178.

53. Ibid. 117.
54. Adams, J., and V.J. Roscigno, "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web." *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 759–778.
55. Brown, Christopher, "WWW.HATE.COM: White Supremacist Discourse on the Internet and the Construction of Whiteness Ideology." *Howard Journal of Communications* 20, no. 2 (May 5, 2009): 189–208.
56. Cammaerts, B, "Radical Pluralism and Free Speech in Online Public Spaces: the Case of North Belgian Extreme Right Discourses." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 6 (October 30, 2009): 555–575.
57. Winter, D., and C. Huff, "Adapting the Internet: Comments From a Women-Only Electronic Forum." *The American Sociologist* 27, no. 1 (1996): 50.
58. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. 178-179
59. Branson, Tyler S, "Steeped in Rhetoric: Digital Populism and the Tea Party Movement." (PhD diss University of Kansas, 2011), 93.
60. Ibid. 96.
61. Ibid. 77-78.
62. Eisenlohr, P, "Language Revitalization and New Technologies: Cultures of Electronic Mediation and the Refiguring of Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 38.
63. Chadwick, A, "Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance." *ISJLP* 5 (2008): 30.
64. Ibid. 39.
65. Stern, Shayla, "Gender Constructed Online, Stereotypes Reified Offline: Understanding Media Representation of Adolescent Girls on MySpace." *International Communications Association*, 2007. 15.
66. Ibid. 5.
67. Sunstein, Cass R. *Republic.com* 19-45.
68. Liu, A, "Friending the Past: the Sense of History and Social Computing." *New Literary History*, 42, no. 1 (2011): 19
69. Howard, P N, "Deep Democracy, Thin Citizenship: the Impact of Digital Media in Political Campaign Strategy." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 169.
70. Rubinson, Joel, "Editorial: Marketing in the Era of Long-Tail Media." *Journal of Advertising Research*. 48, no. 3. (2008)
71. Anstead, N, and B O'Loughlin, "The Emerging Viewertariat and BBC Question Time: Television Debate and Real-Time Commenting Online." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16, no. 4 (November 8, 2011): 441.
72. Bishop, George F. *The Illusion of Public Opinion*. Rowman & Littlefield, (2005) 1-8
73. Ibid. 457-459.
74. Heller, Nathan, "The Disconnect." *The New Yorker*, April 16, 2012. Accessed May 2, 2012. [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2012/04/16/120416crbo\\_books\\_heller?currentPage=all&mobify=0](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2012/04/16/120416crbo_books_heller?currentPage=all&mobify=0).
75. Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*. (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1995)
76. Kim, Joohan. "Phenomenology of Digital-Being." *Human Studies* 24, no. 1 (2001): 107.
77. Hall, Stuart. "Who Needs "Identity"?" In *Identity: a Reader*, edited by P. du Gay, J. Evans, and P. Redman, 19. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001.

78. Turkle, S. "Our Split Screens." *Etnofoor* 15, no. 1/2. (2002): 7.
79. Ibid. 9.
80. Turkle, Sherry, "The Flight From Conversation." NYTimes.com, April 21, 2012. Accessed May 5, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/opinion/sunday/the-flight-from-conversation.html?pagewanted=all>.
81. Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 16.
82. Ibid. 163.
83. Ibid. 260.
84. Ibid. 262.
85. Dibbell, Julian, "A Rape in Cyberspace; or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society." In *Reading Digital Culture*, edited by David Trend, 119–123. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). [http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle\\_vv.html](http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle_vv.html).
86. Shaviro, S. "Money for Nothing: Virtual Worlds and Virtual Economies." In *Virtual Worlds*, 53–67. (Hyderabad: The Icfai University Press, 2008).
87. Gossett, Jennifer Lynn, and Sarah Byrne, "'Click Here': a Content Analysis of Internet Rape Sites." *Gender & Society* 16, no. 5 (October 1, 2002): 689–709.
88. Santorineos, M., and T. Sant, "Rape, Murder and Suicide Are Easier When You Use a Keyboard Shortcut: Mouchette, an on-Line Virtual Character." *Leonardo* 38, no. 3 (2005): 202–206.
89. Mesch, Gustavo S, and Guy Beker, "Are Norms of Disclosure of Online and Offline Personal Information Associated with the Disclosure of Personal Information Online?" *Human Communication Research* 36, no. 4 (September 16, 2010): 570–592.
90. Turkle, S. "Our Split Screens." 13.
91. Mesch and Beker. "Norms of Disclosure" 571.
92. Wilson, Brian, "Ethnography, the Internet, and Youth Culture: Strategies for Examining Social Resistance and 'Online-Offline' Relationships." *Canadian Journal of Education* 29, no. 1 (2006): 317
93. For more on the concept of cosmopolitan identity and the way new media facilitates such identities, see Sarigollu, B, "The Possibility of a Transnational Public Sphere & New Cosmopolitanism Within the Networked Times: Understanding a Digital Global Utopia: 'Avaaz. Org' and a Global Media Event: 'Freedom Flotilla'." *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies* 1, no. 4 (October 2011).
94. Nah, Seungahn, Aaron S Veenstra, and Dhavan V Shah, "The Internet and Anti-War Activism: a Case Study of Information, Expression, and Action." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 1 (October 2006): 230–247.
95. Gillan, Kevin, "The UK Anti-War Movement Online : Uses and Limitations of Internet Technologies for Contemporary Activism." *Information, Communication & Society* 12, no. 1 (2008): 25–43.
96. Kreimer, S.F, "Technologies of Protest: Insurgent Social Movements and the First Amendment in the Era of the Internet." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 150 (2001): 119.
97. Lind, Matthew "Stop Pretending Cyberspace Exists" Salon.com [http://www.salon.com/2013/02/12/the\\_end\\_of\\_cyberspace/](http://www.salon.com/2013/02/12/the_end_of_cyberspace/)

98. Kennedy, Helen, "Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research." *New Media & Society* 8, no. 6 (2006): 873.
99. Ibid. 873.
100. Jurgenson, Nathan. "Strong and Mild Digital Dualism" *Cyborgology* Oct 29, 2012. Accessed April 5, 2013. <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/10/29/strong-and-mild-digital-dualism/>
101. Vial, Stéphane. "There is no difference between the "real" and the "virtual": a brief phenomenology of digital revolution" *Paper presented at Theorizing the Web 2013*. March 2, 2013, in New York, NY.
102. Kelty. *Two Bits*.
103. Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360–1380.

## Bibliography

- Adams, J., and V.J. Roscigno. "White Supremacists, Oppositional Culture and the World Wide Web." *Social Forces* 84, no. 2 (2005): 759–778.
- Anstead, N, and B O'Loughlin. "The Emerging Viewertariat and BBC Question Time: Television Debate and Real-Time Commenting Online." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16, no. 4 (November 8, 2011): 440–462.
- Bilal, Wafaa, and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot an Iraqi*. San Francisco:City Lights Publishers, 2008.
- Bolter, J David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000.
- Branson, Tyler S. "Steeped in Rhetoric: Digital Populism and the Tea Party Movement." PhD dissertation, University of Kansas, 2011.
- Brown, Christopher. "WWW.HATE.COM: White Supremacist Discourse on the Internet and the Construction of Whiteness Ideology." *Howard Journal of Communications* 20, no. 2 (May 5, 2009): 189–208.
- Burnett, G. "The Scattered Members of an Invisible Republic: Virtual Communities and Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics." *The Library Quarterly* (2002): 155–178.
- Castells, Manuel. "Materials for an Exploratory Theory of the Network Society." *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 5–24.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Cammaerts, B. "Radical Pluralism and Free Speech in Online Public Spaces: the Case of North Belgian Extreme Right Discourses." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 6 (October 30, 2009): 555–575.
- Carpentier, Nico. "Participation Is Not Enough: the Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices." *European Journal of Communication* 24, no. 4 (November 6, 2009): 407–420.

- Cerulo, K.A. "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* (1997): 385–409.
- Chadwick, A. "Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance." *ISJLP* 5 (2008): 9–41.
- Cohen, Cathy J, Joseph Kahne, Benjamin Bowyer, Ellen Middaugh, and Jon Rogowski. *Participatory Politics*. Chicago, IL: MacArthur Foundation, July 2012.
- Coleman, G. "Hacker Politics and Publics." *Public Culture* 23, no. 3 (November 16, 2011): 511–516.
- Coleman, E Gabriella, and Alex Golub. "Hacker Practice Moral Genres and the Cultural Articulation of Liberalism." *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 3 (2008): 255–277.
- Coleman, E Gabriella. "Our Weirdness Is Free." *Triple Canopy*, no. 15 (January 2012). [http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our\\_weirdness\\_is\\_free](http://canopycanopycanopy.com/15/our_weirdness_is_free).
- Critical Art Ensemble. "Nomadic Power and Cultural Resistance." In *New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, 781–790. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.
- Dahlberg, Lincoln. "The Internet, Deliberative Democracy, and Power: Radicalizing the Public Sphere." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 3, no. 1 (2007): 47–64.
- Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace; or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database Into a Society." In *Reading Digital Culture*, edited by David Trend, 119–123. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. [http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle\\_vv.html](http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle_vv.html).
- Dong, H. "Identity Discussion: a Discourse Analysis of the Ingroup Identity Differences Enacted by One Thread of Online Discussions." *China Media Relations* 5, no. 2 (2009): 13–24.
- Eisenlohr, P. "Language Revitalization and New Technologies: Cultures of Electronic Mediation and the Refiguring of Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 21–45.
- "Randi Zuckerberg Runs in the Wrong Direction on Pseudonymity Online." *Electronic Frontier*

- Foundation*. August 2, 2011. Accessed May 3, 2012. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2011/08/randi-zuckerberg-runs-wrong-direction-pseudonymity>
- Galloway, Alexander R. *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004.
- Ginsburg, Faye. "Rethinking the Digital Age." In *The Media and Social Theory*, edited by David Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee, 127–144. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360–1380.
- Granovetter, Mark. "The Strength of Weak Ties: a Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1, no. 1 (1983): 201–233.
- Gossett, Jennifer Lynn, and Sarah Byrne. "'Click Here': a Content Analysis of Internet Rape Sites." *Gender & Society* 16, no. 5 (October 1, 2002): 689–709.
- Hall, Stuart. "Who Needs 'Identity'?" In *Identity: a Reader*, edited by P. du Gay, J. Evans, and P. Redman, 15–30. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*. Rev. Ed. edited by Kellner and Meenakishi, MA: Blackwell, 2001.
- Hansen, Mark. "Media Theory." *Theory, Culture and Society* 12, no. 2 (2006): 297–306.
- Heller, Nathan. "The Disconnect." *The New Yorker*, April 16, 2012. [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2012/04/16/120416crbo\\_books\\_heller?currentPage=all&mobify=0](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2012/04/16/120416crbo_books_heller?currentPage=all&mobify=0).
- Howard, P N. "Deep Democracy, Thin Citizenship: the Impact of Digital Media in Political Campaign Strategy." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 153–170.
- Huckin, TN. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Functional Approaches to Written Text*, 78–92. Washington, DC: US Department of State, 1997.



- Islam, G. "Virtual Speakers, Virtual Audiences: Agency, Audience and Constraint in an Online Chat Community." *Dialectical Anthropology* 30, no. 1 (2006): 75.
- Jurgenson, Nathan. "Strong and Mild Digital Dualism" *Cyborgology* Oct 29, 2012. Accessed April 5, 2013. <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/10/29/strong-and-mild-digital-dualism/>
- Kelty, Christopher M. *Two Bits*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008.
- Kelly, Kevin. *Out of Control*. New York: Basic Books, 1995. <http://www.kk.org/outofcontrol/contents.php>.
- Kennedy, H. "Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research." *New Media & Society* 8, no. 6 (2006): 859.
- Kim, Joochan. "Phenomenology of Digital-Being." *Human Studies* 24, no. 1 (2001): 87–111.
- Kolisetty, Akhila. "Segregation in the Social Web?" *Akhilak.com*. accessed April 17, 2012. <http://akhilak.com/blog/2011/06/01/segregation-in-the-social-web/>
- Kreimer, S.F. "Technologies of Protest: Insurgent Social Movements and the First Amendment in the Era of the Internet." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 150 (2001): 119.
- Lane, Jill. "Digital Zapatistas." *The Drama Review* 47, no. 2 (2003): 129–144.
- Lemke, L. J. "Analyzing Verbal Data: Principles, Methods and Problems." In *International Handbook of Science Education*, edited by Barry J Fraser and Kenneth George Tobin, 1271. New York: Kulwer Publishing, 1998. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/education/jlemke/papers/handbook.htm>.
- Liu, A. "Friending the Past: the Sense of History and Social Computing." *New Literary History*, 42, no. 1 (2011): 1–30.
- Livingstone, Sonia. "The Challenge of Changing Audiences: or, What Is the Audience Researcher to Do in the Age of the Internet?." *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 75–86.
- Marres, Noortje. *Material Participation: Technology, the Environment and Everyday Publics*.

Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

McGee, M.C. "The 'Ideograph': a Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 1–16.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Mesch, Gustavo S, and Guy Beker. "Are Norms of Disclosure of Online and Offline Personal Information Associated with the Disclosure of Personal Information Online?." *Human Communication Research* 36, no. 4 (September 16, 2010): 570–592.

Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: the Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.

Nagar, Na'ama. "The Loud Public: the Case of User Comments in Online News Media." PhD dissertation, University at Albany, SUNY, 2011.

Nissenbaum, Helen. "Hackers and the Contested Ontology of Cyberspace." *European Journal of Communication* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 195–217.

Papacharissi, Zizi. "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: the Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond." In *The Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Philip Howard and Andrew Chadwick, 230–245. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Papacharissi, Zizi. "A Networked Self: Identity Performance and Sociability on Social Network Sites." In *Frontiers in New Media Research*, edited by F. L. Lee, L. Leung, J. Qiu, & D. Chu. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012.

Poletti, Anna. "Intimate Economies: PostSecret and the Affect of Confession." *Biography* 34, no. 1 (2011): 25-36. <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed April 9, 2012).

Poster, Mark. "Cyberdemocracy: the Internet and the Public Sphere." In *Internet Culture*, edited by David Porter, 201–218. New York, New York: Routledge, 1997.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001.

Rheingold, Howard. *Smart Mobs*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2002.

- Rubinson, Joel. 2008. Editorial: Marketing in the Era of Long-Tail Media. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 48, no. 3: 2008-2302.
- Rybas, Natalia. 2008. Attempting to Reveal the Secret: A Semiotic Analysis of Postcards in the PostSecret Project. Paper presented at the National Communication Association. 1-28.
- Santorineos, M., and T. Sant. "Rape, Murder and Suicide Are Easier When You Use a Keyboard Shortcut: Mouchette, an on-Line Virtual Character." *Leonardo* 38, no. 3 (2005): 202–206.
- Sarigollu, B, "The Possibility of a Transnational Public Sphere & New Cosmopolitanism Within the Networked Times: Understanding a Digital Global Utopia: "Avaaz. Org" and a Global Media Event: "Freedom Flotilla"." *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies* 1, no. 4 (October 2011).
- Shaviro, S. "Money for Nothing: Virtual Worlds and Virtual Economies." In *Virtual Worlds*, 53–67. (Hyderabad: The Icfai University Press, 2008).
- Söderberg, Johan. *Free Software to Open Hardware: Critical Theory on the Frontiers of Hacking*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2011. 24-25
- Stern, Shayla. 2007. "Gender Constructed Online, Stereotypes Reified Offline: Understanding Media Representation of Adolescent Girls on MySpace." Paper presented at International Communications Association. 1-23.
- Turner, Fred. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2006. 215-224.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.
- Turkle, Sherry. "The Flight From Conversation." *NYTimes.com*, April 21, 2012. Accessed May 5, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/opinion/sunday/the-flight-from-conversation.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995

Turkle, Sherry. "Our Split Screens." *Etnofoor* 15 (2002): 5–19.

Vial, Stéphane. "There is no difference between the "real" and the "virtual": a brief phenomenology of digital revolution" Paper presented at Theorizing the Web 2013, New York, New York, March 2, 2013.

Van Dijk, T.A. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse & Society* 4, no. 2 (1993): 249–283.

Warf, B., and J. Grimes. "Counterhegemonic Discourses and the Internet." *Geographical Review* 87, no. 2 (1997): 259–274.

Wark, McKenzie. *A Hacker Manifesto*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14 (January 2002): 49–90.

Wilson, B. "Ethnography, the Internet, and Youth Culture: Strategies for Examining Social Resistance and 'Online-Offline' Relationships." *Canadian Journal of Education* 29, no. 1 (2006): 307–328.

Winter, D., and C. Huff. "Adapting the Internet: Comments From a Women-Only Electronic Forum." *The American Sociologist* 27, no. 1 (1996): 30–54.

Wood, Peggi. 2009. "Post Secrets from the Edge: Guilt, Shame and Redemption: Through Anonymous Online Confession." Paper presented at National Communication Association. 1-28.

Zuckerman, Ethan. "The Partisan Internet and the Wider World." [Ethanzuckerman.com](http://www.ethanzuckerman.com). Accessed April 17, 2012. <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2010/05/24/the-partisan-internet-and-the-wider-world/>