Politics and Web 2.0:
The Participation Gap

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Introduction

J. Paulo Serra and Gisela Gonçalves

The starting point of this book is the paradoxical state of the art regarding political communication's potential and pitfalls in the Web 2.0 era.[1] In fact, empirical evidence has shown that neither citizens nor political parties have been taking full advantage of online features in regard to political participation. This is particularly evident in the case of political parties' websites, which have taken on two main functions: i) Disseminating information to citizens and journalists about the history, structure, programme and activities of the party; ii) Monitoring citizens' opinions in regard to different political questions and policy proposals that are under discussion. This means that, in spite of the integration of websites into political parties' "permanent campaigns" (Blumenthal), TV continues to be seen as the core medium in political communication and thus one-way and top-down communication strategies still prevail. In other words, it is "business as usual".

Several issues arise from this context. With this book, we aim to keep the debate around the party-citizen "participation" mismatch alive. Ultimately, we consider it important to inquire as to whether Web 2.0 could help citizens' political participation or if a new research stream should be identified. The chapters of this book respond to that challenge and provide valuable explorations of how political parties face the digital online apparatus regarding citizen participation at micro and macro level. The micro level involves research on an individual level, mainly focusing on the practices of individuals, while the macro level is more aimed at an analysis of broader, inter-societal systems. Within the 6 chapters gathered in this book, both levels of analysis are presented and intertwined, which leads to an overarching and thought-provoking discussion

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[1] This was also the theme of the research project "New media and politics: citizen participation in the websites of Portuguese political parties", developed at University of Beira Interior between 2012 and 2015 with a FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology) grant. More information can be found here: `http://www.political-participation-web.ubi.pt/`

about the political participation gap, its causes and consequences for political communication and democratic politics, as well as new forms of political participation in contemporaneity.

The first chapter in the volume critically reflects on the history of communication studies, often focused on the effects of the media, to demonstrate how some characteristics of Web 2.0 provide elements for a communication theory that is able to provide a framework for social changes and the implications of communication processes in social semiosis, i.e. the semiosis of mediatization. In "*In search of a return to communication (studies) as a factor of social change: Web 2.0 and political participation*", Giovandro Marcos Ferreira, from the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil, is concerned with demonstrating the importance of the community, exercising citizenship on and over the internet, and its links with other institutions that are present in the public space. In particular, the author reflects on how the new wider public space can include what are known as "extimate" operations – a play on words that means externalizing the intimate. In other words, it is a space often frequented by emotion, intimacy and passion in public discussions.

Joaquín Lopez del Ramo, from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain, presents "*Descriptive indicators of photojournalistic treatment of political leaders from the standpoint of content analysis*". With this research, he uses the content analysis methodology to obtain in-depth, exhaustive and relevant data on how photojournalism deals with political leaders. Moreover, he underlines how stereotypes, ideological bias and an excess or abuse of "clichés", especially during electoral campaigns, may explain the distance between the public and politicians, by broadcasting the impression of a prefabricated image, hollow rhetoric or even falseness.

The Spanish political party *Podemos*, new on the European scene, is the focus of the chapter authored by Karen Sanders, from CEU San Pablo University and the IESE Business School, Spain. In "*The emergence of Spain's Podemos (We Can) Party: Challenges for political communication practice and study*" the author discusses how *Podemos* and other political groups and the popular distrust of mainstream politicians and political parties have placed the phenomenon of political populism firmly on the Spanish political and public agenda. Moreover, the author discusses how *Podemos*' highly professional approach to political communication, using both traditional and social media to great effect, has at the same time sought to democratize its communication. This leads to an interesting debate

about the so-called "false dichotomy", according to which professional campaigns are seen as somehow incompatible with democratic communication that empowers the citizen.

The concept of cosmopolitanism and its importance for understanding the modern transnational world is at the core of the chapter by Peter Dahlgren, from Lund University, Sweden, who critically analyses its utility in helping to understand the conditions for political activism in the context of a global civil society. The essay "*Cosmopolitanism, media and global civil society: From moral to political agency*" begins with reflections on global activism and stresses that much of the literature on cosmopolitanism comprises a normative discourse, asserting a moral obligation to global Others. The author then attempts to make the transition from moral to political engagement, and argues for the notion of civic cosmopolitanism.

Evandro Oliveira, from Leipzig University and the University of Minho, together with Gisela Gonçalves, from the University of Beira Interior, centre their research on the Portuguese Parliament's online communication to reflect on how social media is being used to foster interaction and dialogue between citizens and Members of Parliament. In "*Talk to me and I will talk for you*", the authors anchor their research in the sociological context of social media communication and its relationship with online political communication and relationship management studies from a political public relations perspective. The main findings obtained with a multimethod approach suggest that the level of professionalization of MPs' online communication is low and that the internet's dialogical promise has not yet materialized in the Portuguese parliamentary realm.

Completing the volume, "*New media and politics: citizens' participation in the websites of Portuguese political parties: main results*", is a chapter in which J. Paulo Serra and Gisela Gonçalves, from the University of Beira Interior, Portugal, present the main findings and discuss the main results obtained throughout the various stages of the three-year implementation of the "*New media and politics: citizen participation in the websites of Portuguese political parties*" project. It aimed to answer to the question 'What is the degree of correspondence between the participation that the websites of the Portuguese political parties allow citizens and citizens' expectations about their participation in non-electoral periods?". By using multiple methods of data collection and analysis (content analysis, controlled experiments, semi-structured interviews, web-based surveys and focus groups), the authors conclude that there is a de-

gree of total correspondence. However, as they also highlight, this affirmative answer hides a doubly negative one: i) the political parties' websites *do not* provide citizens with real participation, but only a simulation of participation, with persuasive and propagandistic objectives; ii) citizens *do not* expect the political parties' websites to allow them more participation than they already do, since what citizens mainly want from the websites is information about the parties.

Finally, we hope that this volume achieves our main goal: to enrich the debate and open new avenues in the study of political participation and Web 2.0. We thank all the contributors, reviewers and thoughtful critics without whose contributions this book would not have been possible.

The Editors

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Chapter 5

Cosmopolitanism, media and global civil society: From moral to political agency

Peter Dahlgren

Overview

As democracies around the world are generally experiencing long-term trends of declining participation in electoral politics and civil society, we also find an opposite trend: the impressive rise in alternative, extra-parliamentarian political activities (Davis, 2010). While one should be cautious about generalizations, Davis (2010, p.149) notes that these political movements, compared to political parties, tend to address a broader range of issues, offer more opportunity for genuine participation, and are less hierarchical and more inclusive. He has in mind movements that are generally "progressive", which translates into mostly left-reformist, as opposed to right-wing or revolutionary politics. (Yet, he notes that this does not mean that such groups always function in a democratic manner). A major and unprecedented aspect of this activism also tends to engage with issues that cross national borders – their political arena is often global. Moreover, the activists are highly reliant on the web and its various ancillary and mobile platforms.

That many citizens are getting involved in what we might call global civil society, beyond party structures, and especially by using the affordances of these highly sophisticated yet very accessible media technologies, opens a new and unchartered phase in the history of democracy. It also invites many possible lines of inquiry, and scholars are approaching these phenomena from a variety of angles. Here I wish to probe these developments from the standpoint of agency, that is, from the perspective of the meaningfulness of such involvement for the actors involved. How are we to understand the motives, practices, and identities that lead people to engage in the global political arena? My ambition here is to elucidate

such agency through the conceptual lens of cosmopolitanism, to
see how this may help us to grasp the grounds on which this agency
is predicated.

While cosmopolitanism has in recent years become somewhat
of a buzzword, it is rather multivalent – like globalization, with which
it shares some terrain. So, one task here is to briefly elucidate a
few key currents, as well as lines of contestation of the concept. My
main focus, however, will be to critically explore what the growing
literature on cosmopolitanism says about civic agency in the global
arena – a situation where citizenship is in the process of redefining
and recreating itself. One of the key currents in this literature, of-
ten with an anchoring in the philosophy of Levinas and his under-
standing of responsibility to the Other, argues for a particular ver-
sion of citizenship that ultimately rests on conceptions of morality
as its platform. The global citizen is thus constructed as a moral
agent, one whose agency is defined and (at least implicitly) evalu-
ated according to moral precepts. My response to this is not that
it is ill-advised or counter-productive *per se*, but rather that it does
not go far enough. To invoke moral frameworks for civic agency and
yet ignore the fundamental raison d'être of democratic citizenship
– namely as a framework for *political* agency – leaves us in an odd
position. Thus I want to probe how we get from moral to political
agency, and what the rhetorical issues involved in such a move are.

I will be looking at three thematic areas: first, global civil soci-
ety as a conceptual setting for political activism, in particular for
alternative democratic politics; second, the concept of cosmopoli-
tanism as an important contemporary analytic framework for prac-
tice in the global context; and third, global media as a public sphere
that can facilitate political participation. Surprisingly, the literature
on cosmopolitanism makes few connections with the media; one of
the exceptions is Silverstone (2006), and I will make use of his notion
of the mediapolis in this regard; he emphasizes the cosmopolitan
perspective and treats the individual's media ecology as a habitus
for moral and political agency. In the final section, I pull together
the discussion with a focus on a trajectory I call civic cosmopoli-
tanism.

Global civil society and alternative politics

Agency, identities, and practices

Why some people become engaged in politics and why many do not are of course complicated questions. One important aspect in this regard is that for people to enact politics, they must in some way feel sufficiently motivated, there must be some normative horizon of the good society, of justice, of a better way, that triggers engagement. Further, they must feel sufficiently empowered, a least at a subjective level, so that participation in politics becomes meaningful for them. Moreover, there must be concrete things for them to do, ways of manifesting this engagement. And there must also be – or they must create – contexts in which to enact their engagement. In short, people need some form of civic identity – a sense of belonging to a political formation that affords them some degree of orientation, efficacy, as well as a sense of possible practices – and the necessary skills – to enact such participation.

Citizenship as an analytic entity has, via an extensive and diverse literature over the past couple of decades, moved beyond its formal and legal horizons to encompass dimensions of agency. The concept is now also understood as referring to the 'doing' of democracy, and this link with agency compels us to reflect on the contexts in which citizenship is enacted, and the contingencies that impact on them.

As a starting point for such considerations, the model of civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009) can be fruitful. I will not review the entire framework here, but the basic idea is that for people to act politically, there must be sets of cultural resources available to them, to facilitate their agency as citizens. Examining civic cultures helps us to specify the factors that might be facilitating or hindering democratic involvement in any concrete situation. Civic cultures are precarious and vulnerable, yet can also be, when vigorous, empowering. Such civic cultures are shaped by many factors, including structures of power, but even the affordances of the media play a central role.

The civic practices of individuals, groups, and larger collectivities can be routine and recurring (e.g. voting), while others are used less often but can still seen as part of a standard repertoire of practices (e.g., writing letters to representatives, mobilizing, demonstrat-

ing). Still others are being invented, adapted, and tested, for example new uses of digital affordances. Communicative skills are central to most civic practices – to be able to read, write, speak – and media technologies have become increasingly central for civic practices. To be able to work with a computer and get around on the internet are important competencies for today's democracy. As new affordances appear with increasing rapidity, new practices are generated. Skills can develop through practices, and in this process foster a sense of empowerment. Civic practices help forge personal and social meaning to the ideals of democracy, and not least help in coalescing forms of civic identities.

What we may call civic identities are a prerequisite for the agency of engaging in politics; and that such identities can be fostered or deflected by the character of civic cultures – which include not least the empowering (and disempowering) potential of media ecologies and media use. There are many ways of being a citizen and of doing democracy; civic identities are protean and multivalent, and evolve via heterogeneous civic cultures in relation to social milieus and institutional mechanisms. Analytically, a robust civic identity implies an empowered political agent and achieved citizenship, one equipped to confront structures of power. Engagement in issues becomes meaningful; citizens feel that they, in concert with others, can in some way make a difference, that they can have some kind of impact on political life, even if they do not win every battle. Today, in the wake of globalization, increasing numbers of people have civic identities and engage in issues that that cross national boundaries.

Situated agency, global issues

Transnational civil society actors vary greatly in their fundamental raison d'être. Some are humanitarian in their orientation; others are engaged in social or cultural networking, for example diasporic or religious groups. Many of these actors are involved in various genres of advocacy, for themselves or as representatives of larger causes or interest groups. A good number of these actors work in tandem with large established international organizations such as the UN or the EU, who actively consult with civil society organizations. Many such actors have become a significant factor at the level of policy-making. There is a large range of explicitly political ac-

tors; some give voice to long-standing, protracted conflicts, others air newly emerged ones, while yet others are working politically to alter the behaviour of governments, regulatory bodies or corporations, based on normative visions of global change. For some political actors, religion is a motivational force. When civil society actors turn towards political discussion and debate, they enter into and constitute the public sphere, a theme I will return to below.

In terms of organization, we encounter here the broad terrain of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit organizations, activist networks, interest and advocacy groups of all kinds, including amorphous social movements. Even alternative journalistic organizations figure here, the most well-known being Indymedia. In short, there is an ever-expanding domain of global civil society, where transnational communication is taking place in a myriad of crisscrossing patterns. Beyond these organizational forms, even grassroots initiatives by activist citizens are part of the overall picture. One of the striking features about all this civic and political global communication is that the range of actors and the breadth of the ideological spectrum visible in global public spheres have become so much larger than they ever were prior to the spread of digital ITCs beginning in the mid-1990s. The literature on global civil society is of course extensive, but some recent contributions which convey summary pictures include Drache (2008); Eberly (2008); Keane (2003); Scholte (2011); Thörn (2009); Walker and Thompson (2008).

Many civil society actors display healthy democratic profiles. Others may have goals or use practices that are questionable, even from within the wide range of definitions and interpretations of democracy that circulate in the world today. Hate groups, racists, and others with obviously anti-democratic and uncivil visions of the world (e.g. terrorist organizations) by definition obviously fall outside the category of global civil society. However, there will no doubt always remain a contested grey zone. One strand of global civil society clearly committed to democratic global development is the alter-globalization movement, also sometimes called the global justice movement, which is comprised of a variety of sub-movements, networks, and organizations. It focuses on a range of issues, such as economic fairness, especially for countries in the global South, environment, human rights, gender issues, labour issues, protection of indigenous cultures, and so on. Though large and diverse, there is a basic conceptual unity, which has to do with the

struggles to find counter-hegemonic alternatives to the present tra-
jectory of neoliberal societal development. Over the past decade,
the World Social Forum (WSF) and its regional offshoots have served
as a major coordinating manifestation of these currents. We can
also put the Occupy movement into this camp as well (see Dahlgren,
2013).

These activists are politically on the left, a largely reformist move-
ment seeking to mobilize public opinion and to influence both law
makers at different levels as well as corporate actors who are per-
ceived to be doing societal harm in transnational contexts. The WSF
has pulled together much of the alter-globalization movement into
a loose, overarching organization that also has regional spinoffs,
such as the European Social Forum. With participants all over the
world, and its roots in the global South, the WSF has a strong non-
Western profile. It holds a major annual meeting, with tens of thou-
sands participating; these began in Brazil as a counterpoint to the
Davos meetings of global political and economic elites. The meet-
ings seek to globally coordinate, build alliances, share knowledge
and experiences, and develop strategies. The alter-globalization mo-
vement generally, and the WSF in particular, has been made aca-
demically visible in recent years; see, for example, Acosta (2009);
Gills (2011); Hosseini (2010); Maeckelburgh (2009); Pleyers (2011).

Activism in global civil society has usually been seen as a one
of many other currents of globalization, but more recently another
term has also come to the fore as an analytic frame: cosmopoli-
tanism. Let us see what lies behind this concept.

Cosmopolitanism: ways of seeing and being

The notion of cosmopolitanism is of course quite old; even Socra-
tes famously claimed that he was not an Athenian, nor a Greek, but
a citizen of the world. Kant gave the concept a strong ethical di-
mension in his modern version of the world citizen; this element
remains prominent even today, as the concept is being reinvented.
With the continuing integration of the world via the processes of
globalization – albeit often in very uneven, unequal and contested
ways – the Other, or rather the many Others, all come closer to us in
our everyday lives. On one level we can see cosmopolitanism as an
expression of concern for the Other, transferred to global contexts.

More specifically – and more useful for research – cosmopolitanism offers an analytic frame for approaching issues about social perceptions of and relations with distant others in the world; it helps us to illuminate the normative grounds for such practices. Morality, as the fundamental conceptions of right and wrong in human affairs – and ethics, as the application, or codification, of morality into concrete norms of behaviour – constitute, at the bottom, the foundation of most human action, even if only implicitly. It therefore remains an important analytic angle of vision for understanding the social world under globalized modernity, not least in the context of transnational politics and political communication.

Multiple horizons

In the rapidly growing literature on cosmopolitanism, we find a number of emphases. One important line of inquiry addresses the vision of a more just and democratic world order (e.g. Archibugi, 2008; Gould, 2004; Sullivan & Kymlicka, 2007; Vernon, 2010). Among such authors, Held (2010) is a prominent voice, and he asserts the exhaustion of traditional politics, especially in the face of massive global problems such as climate change, the financial crisis, and human rights. He argues that cosmopolitanism is the only realistic way forward. Others focus on a particular aspect of this larger theme, namely the notion of citizenship, and the issues of rights and inclusion in the contemporary global situation, not least in regard to the EU (e.g. Benhabib, 2004, 2006; Habermas, 2006; Morris, 2010).

Further, much of the contemporary discussion about cosmopolitanism ranges over moral theory and political philosophy (Breckenridge, *et al.*, 2004; Brock & Brighouse, 2005; Nussbaum, 2006). These contributions are to a great extent characterized by normative discourses. Still other interventions address the socio-cultural preconditions for cosmopolitanism and/or its subjective dimensions (e.g., Beck, 2006; Appiah, 2007; Hannerz, 1996). In her recent review of the literature, Taraborrelli (2015) distinguishes between moral, legal, and cultural forms of cosmopolitanism. While some of the authors link cosmopolitanism in a general way with the political, a few explicitly frame it in terms of a critical confrontation with neoliberalism and its consequences (e.g. Cheah, 2007; Dallmayr, 2009; Delanty, 2009; and Harvey, 2009). Indeed, Harvey takes several authors, such as Nussbaum, Beck and Held, to task for what he sees

to be their implicit collusion with neoliberalism. The collection by Braidotti, Hanafin, and Blaagaard (2013) also puts the emphasis on what is called cosmopolitics, while the anthology by Carus and Parvu (2014) underscores how resistance to global hegemonies might contribute to new ways of conceiving cosmopolitanism that avoid totalizing and (ultimately) hegemonic approaches.

Delanty (2009) sees cosmopolitanism as a dimension in contemporary social processes that can serve as a normative critique of globalization, and thus of capitalism. He underscores that cosmopolitanism can promote our capacity for self-reflection, and foster new ways of seeing the world when diverse peoples experience common problems. Distancing himself from more anthropological approaches, he argues that the conflicts around 'difference' in the world today are less about culture and more about social and economic questions that have significant political implications. The global world requires a new kind of imagination, i.e. one that is cosmopolitan and where the learning process is about becoming both post-national and post-market in one's horizons. Thus, cosmopolitanism can be seen as promoting changes in the understanding between Self and Other, and projecting this motif onto the global arena. His framework includes a micro-level of identities, social movements and communities, where new cultural forms can take shape and new spaces of discourse can open up – to confront political realities.

In the pluralism of approaches to cosmopolitanism, we see a fundamental issue that has to do with the basic tension between universalism and the particular (or local, or national). Is there one set of cosmopolitan values and perceptions, a 'one-size-fits-all'? The answers have political implications. Breckenridge *et al.* (2002) propose that the concept be used in the plural, and not be associated with the unitary, privileged position of the European tradition, since the motivation and capacity to reflect on those beyond one's own culture is to be found in all regions of the world. At the same time, the editors suggest that that a genuine 'spirit' of cosmopolitanism is something that is yet in the future, and should be treated as a normative vision. Thus, we can discern an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, cosmopolitanism as an expression of multiple empirical realities around the world, and, on the other, cosmopolitanism as a unitary global ideal, with universalist virtues (these tensions are followed up in Brock 2013). Universalist claims are at times vulnerable to critiques of embodying ethnocentrism or cultural speci-

ficity (e.g. Habermas' notions about the ideal speech situation). Is the notion of a unitary normative vision inherently an expression of a camouflaged manoeuvre for cultural power?

Turner (2002) draws on the 16th century writer Michel Montaigne and his sceptical humanism, especially his notion of irony, to develop precisely a sense of universal cosmopolitan virtue. Turner sees Montaigne as espousing what he calls the softer (feminine) values of mercy, compassion and tenderness – in response to the horrors of the wars of his time. Cosmopolitan virtue basically encompasses pacifist values that preclude violence and promote human agency and dignity. Turner argues that there is a great diversity of human happiness, but there is unity in suffering. For cosmopolitan virtue, a "general opposition to human suffering constitutes a standpoint that both transcends and unites different cultures and historical epochs" (Turner, 2002: xx).

If human rights exist to protect us from suffering, then there are universal human obligations to oppose misery, to respect cultures of other peoples and to oppose governments that fail to protect human rights. Turner makes the cosmopolitan argument even more convincing by contending that the vulnerability of the human body provides a starting point for an account of human commonality and compassion as the basis for a cosmopolitan ethic. For him, The UN Declaration of Human Rights is obviously a very cosmopolitan document, which he builds into his argument.

Thus, one way of understanding contemporary cosmopolitanism is to see it as a response to ethnic cleansing and racial violence in the context of a global economy that is creating ever-greater gulfs between rich and poor. Such a virtue is a set of obligations that flows from a recognition of the vulnerability of persons and of the precariousness of institutions with the globalization of culture. Turner thereby takes a clear stand against moral relativism. However, one could respond that Turner's position is 'easy': to reduce physical suffering is perhaps not so controversial. In situations that, for example, have to do with expressions of minority community membership in majoritarian cultural settings (e.g. apparel of religious expression), can we easily identify an operational universal ethic?

Towards empirical investigation

Given the conceptual fluidity of the literature on cosmopolitanism, there is of course the danger that the notion can become all things to all people. Corpus Ong (2009) discusses how theorists in various disciplines view the central idea of cosmopolitanism, and he derives four basic categories, under which he places the major authors: *closed* (i.e. un- or anti-cosmopolitan), *prestige* (where status and privilege are closely associated with it), *banal* (an everyday, 'ordinary' openness to otherness as an expression of one's own identity) and *ecstatic* (a kind of visionary enthusiasm). Quite a number of authors land in the latter category. Other reflections on the literature, such as Kendall, Woodward and Skribis (2009), note a certain degree of political naïveté among many authors. There is a utopian tendency to construct a new world of tolerant and responsible citizens, while offering little analytic insight on how to deal with the major global divides – or ignoring them altogether. These authors thus share some of Harvey's (2009) critical views in this regard.

Further, Skrbis and Woodward (2013) suggest that many discussions on cosmopolitanism would be more fruitful if the ethical component were a bit more modest, and if the concept could be developed with a stronger eye on methodology. They find that that 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' is expressed as an ensemble of discourses mobilized as everyday accounts. These accounts deal with such issues as cultural heterogeneity and global problems. However, rather than taking the 'high road' which leads to openness and hospitality to strangers, and puts generalized human needs ahead of national interests, many people instead discursively frame cosmopolitanism as the attractive affordances of globalization, such as travel and culinary diversity. Moreover, even discourses about 'cultural loss' and the 'dilution of national culture' are in circulation.

While their research underscores the obvious point that cosmopolitanism is as yet not a universal phenomenon, it also – and more interestingly – suggests that it is also possible to empirically study the concept as something socially constructed by concrete actors, contingent on specific contexts. Also, their work affirms the importance of Delanty's idea that cosmopolitanism is also played out (or not) in the everyday terrain of identities and communities (see also Hier, 2008). Here, we can readily see the ideals of cosmopolitanism in tension with concrete multicultural settings, not least around the

issues of immigration. They emphasize that cosmopolitanism is something big, but must also be manifested in small contexts; an immense global intellectual and political project.

One does not have to be physically mobile to be a cosmopolitan, as demonstrated by Kant himself, who seldom ventured far beyond Köningsberg. Hannerz (1996) underscores that cosmopolitanism has to do with a mind-set, a disposition. And increasingly, the world is coming to us: more and more often, the local manifests elements of the global (e.g. mixed neighbourhoods). Cosmopolitanism, as an 'openness to the world' according to Corpus Ong (2009) can in principle begin on one's own street. And not least, we have access to the 'world', via the media, as will be discussed presently. Sociological common sense would suggest that having contact with those different from oneself could help facilitate a cosmopolitan stance. Certainly the world – present and past – is full of examples of successful neighbourhoods, cities, states and empires where tolerance and openness to difference have prevailed.

However, the socio-cultural prerequisites are rather high, and it is not surprising that the empirical results such as offered by Skrbis and Woodward (2013) are quite sobering. Self-reflection with respect to our own cultural context, origins, and values, which go hand in hand with scepticism towards the 'grand narratives' of modern ideologies (Turner, 2002), seemingly involve a considerable degree of cultural capital. Achieving a sense of distance from one's own background and identity, developing some critical distance about the ultimate authority of one's own culture, are not ingrained dimensions of most collective frames of reference.

This kind of cultural capital, predicated on routine encounters with those significantly different from oneself, is precisely what many insular communities lack the world over, not least those in a minority or subordinate position. Getting even a 'small taste' of globalization via the media, for example, may in fact lead to further cultural defensiveness, closure, exclusion, and even violence.

Intersections: post-colonialism

In considering these aspects, especially in regard to identities, it is important that we do not lapse into a dead-end quest for some mythic "new cosmopolitan subject". Rather, we need to underscore what Dallmayr (2003) calls the "situated differences and motiva-

tional resources" in discussing empirically the socio-cultural con-
tingencies of cosmopolitan practices and identities. This angle soon
touches base with the themes of history and power. While culture
in today's world is of course not something that simply mirrors the
flow of economic and political power from centres to peripheries,
the history of colonialism makes it difficult to deny the importance
of these mechanisms (and here of course the structures of the media
and the patterns of their representation loom especially large). In
short, if globalization constitutes the key contemporary condition
for the actualization of cosmopolitanism, then the prevailing power
relations (and their historical origins) in the global arena would seem-
ingly have importance for understanding the character and pos-
sibilities of cosmopolitanism. Global power can of course be ap-
proached in different ways, not least the political economy of the
world system, but the perspective of post-colonialism offers a sig-
nificant prism through which to view cosmopolitanism. Post- colo-
nialism, in ways similar to Cultural Studies (with which it at times
blends together), is sensitive to how culture and the production of
meaning are always bound up in some way or other with relations
of power.

It is interesting to note that in the past two decades or so two key
theoretic traditions – globalization (with its home largely in the so-
cial sciences) and post-colonialism (hovering more in the humani-
ties) have had relatively few encounters with each other. They seem-
ingly exist in parallel universes, when in fact they should be very
much entwined – although this lack of interaction is beginning to
be addressed (for example, see the collection by Krishnaswamy and
Hawley, 2008). For cosmopolitanism, post-colonialism can serve to
help alert us to the historical antecedents of a vast array of aspects
where power, especially cultural power, has relevance: patterns of
cultural influences, images of the other, identity processes, inte-
gration/assimilation, language use, institution-building, and so on.
Conceptually and empirically, cosmopolitanism cannot be reduced
to a mere function of power, yet nor can power be ignored. If power
is not obviously manifest, then is always hovering there – in both
micro- and macro- circumstances – as a potential on the threshold
of becoming realized. Power evokes counter-power, so it is not sim-
ply a case of uni-directional and deterministic mechanisms, even
though hegemonic positions are prevalent.

Pulling together the key trajectories in the literature on cosmopolitanism for the discussion at hand, we see that the concept is quite multivalent, yet a critical strain can be extracted, one that resonates with the contributions of post-colonialist studies and that can be deployed in the confrontations with global neoliberalism. There is a strong normative dimension; while this can be veer off into excessive philosophical enthusiasm about a new world order, it also anchors a responsibility to the Other, to global Others. While tensions remain between situated and universalist versions of cosmopolitanism, there is sufficient ground for a view that resonates with the discourses of human rights and the imperative to reduce human suffering.

Increasingly, the global world is becoming part of our spaces of habitat, part of our everyday encounters, in physical or mediated terms. Cosmopolitan mind-sets, and the identities and practices that embody them, have socio-cultural contingencies; empirical research suggests that for most people in most settings, the cultural capital or other resources required for the necessary self-reflection and distancing regarding the prevailing collective world views are insufficient. In practice, then, we may expect cosmopolitanism to be associated with groups who are in some ways specialized or privileged. With these general precepts in place, let us now turn to the next theme of the discussion, the media, and in particular, the global *mediapolis*.

The *mediapolis*: a new kind of public sphere

I mentioned at the outset that analyses of the media have oddly not figured extensively in the literature on cosmopolitanism. There are some exceptions, among them Norris and Ingelhart (2009), who offer a major empirical effort to establish the links between mass media use and cosmopolitan mind-sets. Large-scale international surveys on values suggest a general positive correlation with media use in this regard, in most countries, although polarization is also a consequence. The authors underscore, however, the research complexity of establishing causal relationships, and make the point that there are also many non-media variables at work. More focused efforts are found in Boltanski (1999), who addresses in a theoretic manner the theme of recognizing and identifying with dis-

tant others via news coverage of suffering, and Chouliaraki (2006),
who addresses this theme but in a more rigorously empirical man-
ner. Robertson (2010, 2015) takes a broad look at television news,
its journalists/editors, and its viewers around the world. She eluci-
dates the role of television news, of both mainstream and 'counter-
hegemonic' variants, in fostering cosmopolitan horizons. For my
purposes here, I will make use of Silverstone (2006), since it explic-
itly engages with key themes in the literature on cosmopolitanism
in its conceptualization of the media's role.

On the *mediapolis*

The book's style is more essayistic than empirical, and has more
the normative character of the dominant literature on cosmopoli-
tanism. However, it assumes that the media play a decisive role in
the constitution of late modernity and its forms of globalization. It
provides a useful starting point for some reflections on media and
cosmopolitanism, with a focus on their relationship to democracy.
I want to sketch his basic ideas pertaining to cosmopolitanism as a
necessary element for civic agency in the modern globalized world,
and the character of the media as a precondition for such agency.
I will thus be using Silverstone's discussion on media and morality
as a springboard for conceptually preparing the way for an under-
standing of cosmopolitanism that links up with democratic agency
and practice in global contexts.

Silverstone navigates carefully between optimism and pessimism,
yet he is clearly conveying an ambitious vision; unsurprisingly, Cor-
pus Ong (2009) unambiguously places him as an ecstatic proponent
of cosmopolitanism. Silverstone adroitly balances the tension be-
tween one or many cosmopolitanisms: he pushes strongly for gen-
eralized shared ethics of responsibility to the Other, but adamantly
acknowledges the situated character of such ethics, i.e. that peo-
ple's actions and moral frameworks are contingent upon their cir-
cumstances. Such contingency inevitably impacts on the meaning
and efficacy of action. He argues that media today have imposed
conditions of cosmopolitanism on us: we can – and must – respond
accordingly from the standpoint of our own lives. Not least, he is
very much aware of the significance of power relations, especially

in regard to the institutions and functioning of the media. This ushers us into the realm of democracy and civic agency. However, let us first backtrack and briefly summarize his main points.

He begins with two familiar observations: that globalization, in all of its economic, cultural, social, and political dimensions, is a key feature of late modernity, and that the media play a decisive role in this regard. Moreover, the media are becoming what he calls 'environmental'; they no longer can be seen as simply discrete flows of messages or information, but rather take on the character of dense symbolic ecologies that penetrate just about every corner of our existence. From these premises he arrives at an important thesis: the *mediapolis* is the space of mediated global appearances. It is via the media that the world appears to us and where appearance constitutes the world. It is through the media that we learn who we are – and who we are different from, and where relations between self and other are conducted in a global public arena. The media establish connections, relationships; they position us in the world.

The *mediapolis* is both a normative and an empirical term. Empirically, it is something other than a rational Habermasian public sphere; it is cacophonic, with multiple voices, inflections images, and rhetoric – it resides beyond logic and rationality, and it cannot offer any expectation of fully effective communication. The communications dynamic that Silverstone sees here he calls *contrapunctual* (from Edward Said's notion of counterpoint). Each communicative thread gains significance only in relationship to others – together, the ensemble of tension-ridden, contradictory communicative interventions comprises the whole.

Normatively, however, despite differences in communicative and other forms of power, the *mediapolis* demands mutual responsibility between producers and audiences/receivers, as well as a capacity for reflexivity on the part of all involved, including recognition of cultural differences. This raises issues of the kinds of reality created by the *mediapolis*, the kinds of publicness, who appears – and how – as well as who does not appear. The notion of *mediapolis* is thus a challenge, a challenge to inequities of representation, mechanisms of exclusion, the imbalances of media power (via both state and capital), and "the ideological and prejudicial frames of unreflexive reporting and storytelling" (Silverstone, 2006: p. 37). Thus, the media, in their representations of the world, inevitably engage in what he calls boundary work. This is done at the macro-level of larger ideological classifications, but also at the micro-level, in the

continuous inscription of difference in any and every media text or discourse. Boundaries are constantly being drawn, reinforced, and altered between various constellations of Us and Them.

The imperative of moral response

Public space is inexorably political, and the media play a big role in the formation of social and civic space, as we know. A key argument in Roger Silverstone's book is that media also constitute a *moral* space – that is, they are a significant site for the construction of a *moral order*. This moral order gives rise to the issue of proximity and distance in regard to the people and events portrayed in the media. Silverstone affirms the importance of – and often the difficulty of establishing what is – 'proper distance' in regard to the way the media situate us in relation to what is portrayed. Social distance is a moral category; to establish proper distance involves a search for enough knowledge and understanding of the other person or the other culture to enable response, responsibility and care; it requires some imagination. The *mediapolis*, then, requires a moral response from us. Silverstone has in his sights a kind of 'moral minimalism' – even though we may still find the normative admonishment involved here to be quite ambitious. Moral response in this context is predicated on the cognitive capacity to understand human difference and sameness, to be able to live with ambiguity in an ever-changing world, and the capacity to respond in a basic, humane way. While he speaks of moral minimalism, Silverstone allows for a variety of responses, i.e. different forms of cosmopolitan behaviour.

This moral response is expressed in our responsibility for thinking, speaking, listening and acting. Silverstone in fact claims that the conditions of the *mediapolis* can provide us with resources for judgement – for cognitive, aesthetic, and moral judgement (for example, the role of the fourth estate includes a version of the Enlightenment project), including the judgement of proper distance. This notion of the responsibility towards others is inspired in part by Levinas (as it is in much of the current literature on cosmopolitanism). Responsibility requires self-reflection; without it we can fail in our responsibility, and we end up "being a partner in evil". Silverstone admits that to speak of virtue may sound a bit quaint today, but we really have no other option.

In underscoring the significance of morality and ethics, Silverstone does not simply mean we should "moralize" about the media, but rather that moral dimensions should become a focus of analytic concern, just as social, political, cultural perspectives are part of our analytic approach to the media. Our responsibility, our moral response to the *mediapolis*, is of course shaped to some extent by the media themselves. Chouliaraki (2006), for example, explores how different modes of media representation can position us differently – evoke different kinds of response – to the suffering portrayed in television journalism. There is clearly an element of media power here: definitional control lies most immediately with the news organizations, but Silverstone's position here is to emphasize that there is still responsibility on both sides. Journalists, editors, and producers have a responsibility for the representations they offer, while audiences/users have an obligation to reflect on what they encounter and respond in an ethical manner – both to the world portrayed and towards the media.

Adding online media

While Silverstone's book was published in 2006, he hardly makes mention of online media, which is puzzling. Not only was Web 2.0 in full swing at the time, but also the interactive dimension of the web, beyond the largely one-way model of the mass media, in fact offers more potential for precisely the kind of moral engagement he is advocating. Here, we can take some help from a recent book on the global public sphere by Volkmer (2014). While noting that the familiar, technical macro-networks of communication – with their active audience-users – constitute a premise for contemporary global communication, she emphasizes the multi-level character of these media and their communicative modes. She underscores that the character of globalized communication today is not defined by these media structures in themselves, but rather by the actual way that individuals and organizations communicate across diverse platforms, from all manner of mainstream media to all kinds of social media. It is in the communication – and editing, mixing, filtering, modifying – of content that we find the new global sphere.

This new public sphere is shaped by individualized nodes "situated within a universe of subjective, personal networked structures linking individuals across world regions" (p.1). There is thus a sig-

nificant emphasis on subjective dynamics here, not only in terms of communicative processes, but in the very character of 'lived' public spaces. Volkmer uses the concept of "micro-networks" to capture the interdependent connections between actors across these thus "assembled" communicative spaces. We have thereby left behind the defining framework of nation-states, and moved to a regime where the local blends readily with the global and all stops in between, based on the identities, loyalties, and allegiances of the actors, operating across the full range of media technologies and platforms; this global public sphere operates across supra- and subnational societal contexts. Adding this portrait of global digital communication renders the notion of the *mediapolis* all the more compelling. Each citizen has all the more potential to be a participating actor, who makes moral choices.

With mediated globalization, the status of the cosmopolitan thus re-emerges as a theme of central concern. Historically, cosmopolitanism has mostly been associated with, or an attribute of, certain elite strata of society. Today, the symbolic global connections via the media raise this to the level of common concern, and allow for extensive participation. In the modern world linked by the media, we are all positioned in relation to remote others. Silverstone asserts the importance of cosmopolitanism, yet is quick to point out the difficulties. It can have a romantic ring to it and can be interpreted in different ways; it embodies a commitment to both reflexivity and toleration. It obligates us to be open to the stranger – even the stranger in oneself. Still more problematically, it remains unclear how these moral horizons can be connected with concrete political practices.

Towards civic cosmopolitanism

From morality to the political

In all this, Silverstone admits that we have some obvious and difficult questions to deal with, not least conceptually. The public as such does not have a strong meaningful status, and, we might add, empirically it is not politically very efficacious. Thought, speech, and action are disconnected and compromised by absence of context, memory, and analytic rigour, as well as by deficit of trust. Also, we witness patterns of withdrawal from the public realm, into the private; in fact, the major dilemmas confronting democracy are ex-

acerbated in the global context. Silverstone's reflections on the political go well beyond traditional liberalism as understood in political philosophy, which underscores individuals' rights and their pursuit of private happiness. His is a political sensibility that puts him at home with republicanism, with its emphasis on individual development through democratic engagement and social responsibilities.

Thus, the *mediapolis* becomes the site not only for moral response, but, potentially, for practices. His notion that our responsibility is expressed in thinking, speaking, listening, and acting leads us directly to the themes of civic agency and skills. The cosmopolitan moral agent must move beyond the state of merely thinking about his or her responsibility; it must be enacted, embodied via some kind of action (which, in the context of the political, will often take some form of communication). Such proactive social ethics, that demand engagement with and responsibility for global others, point us towards cosmopolitan citizenship, which engages with the world not least via the *mediapolis*, in a manner that is strongly tied to some version of democracy. This link between cosmopolitanism and democratic civic agency – I call it *civic cosmopolitanism* (Dahlgren 2013) – involves translating the cosmopolitan moral stance into concrete political contexts that benefit not just our own interests but those of globalized others. Cosmopolitanism becomes thus an inexorable dimension of contemporary republican civic virtue and agency.

I share Silverstone's view of the media as environmental, as an ecology that can become – or has already become – in part become "polluted" (in a moral sense) in many areas and thus detrimental to our well-being. Silverstone is concerned with fundamental questions of how we should live – and live with all our Others. He is concerned with the "good society", or rather, the "good, globalized society". It is here, in a sense at the outer edges of his work, where I would like to pick up that baton and run with it.

In talking about the media, Silverstone tends to foreground the mass media, and argues that they contain institutions and organizations, which in turn are comprised of categories of people working in their identifiable roles under specific situations: journalists, editors of various sorts, owners, producers, programme directors, managers, accountants, lawyers, etc.

As I mentioned earlier, he does not develop the discussion much on the internet, although he underscores that its technologies are altering the basic parameters of the *mediapolis* and points out that in terms of publicness, the internet (or at least small scale interaction on the net) requires the mass media as a context, as a contextual background, to avoid spiralling away into enclave mentalities (though we would add that the internet itself of course also has the character of mass mediated communication). Let us add the horizons of the digital global public sphere I referred to above, as developed by Volkmer (2014), with its emphasis on personal networks that link individuals – netizens – globally. We thus have a situation today where global netizens are technologically empowered to impact on the character of the *mediapolis*. In short, we have sets of individuals who act as elements of larger collective agencies, as well as in looser social networks. I would emphasize that this horizon of the individual level does not to signal a suspension of a sociological perspective, but rather underscores the dimension of human agency, where moral reflection is in principle always possible. Thus, in simple terms, the *mediapolis* is populated by people acting as audience members, as participants in the media industries, and as netizens. The differing horizons of these various social positions of course provide different contexts in terms of moral action.

The horizon of civic agency

Cosmopolitanism, in ways similar to the dilemmas of late modern democracy, involves realistic balances between optimism and pessimism, as well as between global and local loyalties. Also, we have tensions between notions of a universalistic democratic core and recognition of plural modes of doing democracy in the world. Few would claim that cosmopolitan citizens must be free-floating in terms of their loyalties, but certainly globalization, with its acceleration of mobility and communication, has thrust democracy into an age where it can no longer be conceived exclusively in terms of national boundaries. However, the jet-set citizen with no anchoring in any particular place will probably not easily respond with moral engagement to the difficult circumstances of remote Others. To be a cosmopolitan citizen does not entail being devoid of a "home", nor does it require that one abandons all sense of solidarity towards

one's country and its people. Without such an anchoring, civic practices will lack grounding. Even in the context of democracy, it is no doubt the case that empathy begins – and is learned – at home.

So, the issue at bottom becomes to conceptualize the transition from moral response to civic agency, to embody cosmopolitan morality in some kind of concrete political practice. Moral response can be seen as a form of engagement, a subjective pre-requisite for political participation (Dahlgren, 2009). And here, the media as sites and spaces for civic practices – as the *mediapolis* – take on obvious relevance.

As a first step, it is worth reiterating a degree of caution, or at least modesty, in regard to universalisms. Turner's (2002) anchoring in the horizons of human rights is an indispensable element here, but things can and do get more complex. Dallmayr (2003) argues cogently that an excessive emphasis on moral universalism can precisely lead us to ignore the contingency of situated differences, external constraints, and other factors that shape the specificity of human action. As he says, "...it is insufficiently moral – in fact, it is hardly moral at all – to celebrate universal values everywhere without also seeking to enable and empower people in their different settings and locations". (Dallmayr, 2003, p. 438). Even if we accept universal norms and ethics at a theoretic level, they do not translate automatically into practice, but require interpretation and application. This immediately gives rise to political questions: how do we make such interpretations and translations?

He offers an important conceptual step in this regard: the "promotion of justice – that is, the removal of misery and oppression – falls more heavily on the rich and powerful than it does on the poor, the oppressed, the subaltern". (Dallmayr 2003, p. 438) From this it seems that the signposts point in the direction of a politics aimed at enhancing freedom and self-governance, i.e. the deepening and strengthening of democracy – allowing, even here, that local circumstances and traditions will inevitably frame this conceptual ideal in various ways. We understand that there are very different structures, dynamics and degrees of normative expectations involved, as Archibugi (2008) argues. This suggests, not least, that at the global level, we launch ourselves into a disappointing dead-end if we visualize world democracy as developing from simple extension of national structures into the transnational arena.

Likewise, we lay aside the idea of the emergence of a new kind of universal "cosmopolitan citizens" or "global souls" who will inhabit the nations of the world and politically lead them towards a more harmonious order on the planet. This scenario is similar to the futile vision of the united workers of the world. We have to be alert and sensitive to the specific settings and the conditions of potential civic agency. Such agency must always be anchored in one's own immediate realities, yet together with that demanding mindset that we somehow cannot bypass, namely some reflexive capacity to distance oneself from these realities, to understand how they impinge on possible forms of practice. In short, what is required is a balancing act: we need to downsize our visions to remove them from the realm of fantasy, yet keep them sufficiently larger than life so that they can still inspire.

If we translate these reflections in the real global political world using, for example, the issue of the environmental dangers that threaten the planet, we have here an overwhelming cosmopolitan imperative. Here, in fact, ultimately, a concern for the Other equals a concern for us all, including ourselves. Each of us has a responsibility to all the global Others for the ecological health of the world. Yet, in the present dangerous ecological situation, it is clear that any moral universalism in regard to the environment must be translated into concrete strategies at regional, national, and local levels – while at the same time maintaining global coordination. We cannot consume our way forward to better ecological balance (despite what some corporate interests would like us to believe), nor is it sufficient that we each individually sort our garbage, although that can be of help. What is required are massive, globally linked efforts to alter fundamental patterns of production, consumption, and lifestyles; we need to arrive at a historical turning point in our contemporary civilization. These efforts, in turn, require political work, at all levels.

Civic agency must deal with structures, and one of the problems of the transnational arena is, as noted, precisely the thinness of democratic structures out there. Habermas (2006) and Benhabib (2006), for example, each draw the conclusion that transnational civic activism today involves the struggle to establish legal frameworks to defend democratic principles in the global arena. Within Europe, this translates, for them, into the EU as a significant project – while acknowledging the issues of the EU's relationship to the rest of the world (e.g. "fortress Europe"). Not only can civic cos-

mopolitanism not ignore global structures, it must actively struggle to develop them and give them a democratic character. For others, such as many of the groups united under the alter-globalization umbrella of the WSF, it requires instead trying to institutionalize the thin presence of democratic global civil society into more robust, durable structures.

If the socio-cultural prerequisites for civic cosmopolitanism are quite high, we should not be startled to learn that in the West, its actors tend to come from the educated middle classes. Yet, in the global South, the pattern seems more heterogeneous. Certainly many of the activists come from privileged backgrounds, but others do not. They instead can be seen as specialized, rather than privileged in this context. The contingencies that facilitate their participation as civic cosmopolitans have more to do with their ability to analyse the connections between local and global circumstances, the counter-hegemonic discourses they encounter, the sense of empowerment engendered by their engagement. In other words, it would seem that the direct experience of the political can in some settings play a more decisive role in mobilizing engagement in global issues than factors such as education or economic background. Moreover, their empowerment as netizens via the online technologies of the *mediapolis* has arguably had in comparative terms even more impact than in the West.

Nobody said it would be easy, but we seem to have run out of global alternatives if we value both our own survival and something that we can still call democracy. Democratic civic agency needs to incorporate the cosmopolitan perspective and pay more attention to morality as an analytic dimension for understanding political agency as an expression of subjectivity. Cosmopolitanism needs to analytically further engage with the media, and look beyond moral categories to situated political practices. Thus: civic cosmopolitans, unite! But do so in your own political contexts. And use the *mediapolis.*

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