Book Reviews

Democracy and New Media. Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Eds.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003. 397 pp. (cloth). ISBN: 0-262-10101-7.

This volume brings together some of the most insightful analysts and practitioners of new media and democracy from academia, government, the fourth estate and new media business, as a tangible result from the MIT seminar series 'Media in transition'. The book includes 22 chapters of varying length, from very short (Agre, Walsh) to full-size (Huesca and Dervin) and of varying standards in terms of originality and tightness of argument. Most contributions are concerned with the Internet, rather than new media in general (e.g. mobiles, DTV, etc.), although traditional media and media systems constitute a now resonant then *sotto voce* counterpoint. *Caveat lector*: this book is more akin to a reader on new media and democracy than the title would suggest. The editors, Jenkins and Thorburn, do a rather better job at setting the stage and even more so at ordering the contributions, than at distilling the results. The introduction is a well-crafted, enjoyable substantive chapter, and a conclusion would have been a welcome addition to the volume. While such heterogeneity may have spelt trouble, contents are well structured along four main themes – systems, citizens, ideology and news – broadly if not perfectly overlapping with three sections. The first section (*How democratic is cyberspace?*) provides an exploration of two main themes: the political ergonomics of new media, and the way in which citizens and new media interact. The debate is conducted with respect to the democratic theme, which is touched upon by most contributors. The only attempt to deviate from this script, by Ira Magaziner, is quite brutally reprimanded by Ben Barber in a rejoinder. Overall, the section weaves two themes, concerning respectively the democratic value of technologies and citizens in relation with electronic democracy.

Concerning the first theme, is it argued that traditional media are inherently passive, not as much *per se*; rather as an influence on citizens' 'habits of mind', what is termed a 'benevolent tyranny' (Morriset). There are six areas where the Internet might enhance democracy: its capacity to broaden access, foster information and education, elicit discussion, favour deliberation and common decision and spark political action. Winston, a former top policy-maker who has a glowing view of the Internet for democracy, extols the virtues of the Net for the '4 Cs': content, communication, collaboration, and community. He argues that institutions – the congress, the media and electoral campaigns – have to adapt to the needs of ICTs empowered individuals, as new media are the best ever tools for the communication of political ideas. Soma is mentioned at some point, 'resistance is futile' is not, but it could well have been. Although similar requirements have been discussed in the past (e.g. by Coleman and Gøtze, Damian Tambini, Steve Bennet), they remain controversial. Barber in fact sets out to critique such assumptions. Based on the observation that the Internet of yore is changing, from text to images and video, he contends that the prevalence of speed on deliberation, simplicity on complexity, pictures over text, information on knowledge and fragmentation on the commons hinders Internet's capacity to enhance democracy. The fact that the state has a growing interest in privatizing the Internet by creating a 'duty free' zone (Magaziner) further exacerbates Barber's worries. Understandably, one may add, as Barber sees 'duty' as the cornerstone of democracy. The exchange in fact highlights an ideological

conflict between information economy and information polity. The assumption that 'information' alone enables a 'faithful representation of reality' is integral in the capitalist mode of production (Sholle), not necessarily reconcilable with democratic practice. But why shouldn't policy makers be optimist? The Internet implies relatively minor policy headaches compared to the perceived benefit of new media for national productivity and growth (Winston).

The book also helps position citizens in the new media environment. Shudson argues that there are different models of citizenship, of which the 'informed citizen' is only one. With the evolution of democratic legitimation from virtue-based, to party-based, finally to rights-based, accounts that consider the rational voter as the cornerstone of democracy are misleading. The same, Shudson argues, goes for accounts that only rely on the capacity of the Internet to improve citizen information. As citizens cannot be 'political backpackers', one should observe movement at the top of the pyramid to assess the impact of new media in the democratic circuit. The reader may turn to Hurwitz, a few pages later, for a more reassuring view on the role of citizens. Although he agrees that there are different models of citizenship – deliberative, partisan and 'monitoral' – it is the latter model that is mostly enhanced in cyberspace. However, this is enacted through societal sentinels, who rais topical issue that Schudson's backpackers can then support. Whilst agreeing on the need to go beyond 'information', Agre puts forward the competing idea that the added benefit offered by the Internet to democracy is 'cognitive pooling', the capacity of creating societal epistemic communities concerned with the public good. Traditional intermediaries, Agre contends, will have to adapt their strategies to fit the new institution. Schuler goes further in examining the results of this pooling, by reviewing a range of projects in the Seattle area that use new media to take control of issue, agendas and decisions at local level. Aptly, Schuler terms this an 'interwoven tapestry' of community networking projects, where new media provide the glue. Etzioni looks at the same phenomenon through the lens of 'community', namely whether community is possible online, and how democratic it may be. In turn, this is assessed in his chapter across four familiar indicators: information sharing, voting, deliberation and representation.

The third theme is about the import of new media in nations where the machinery of democratic government is less established. The section title, *Global developments* is slightly misleading, as the chapters included are neither global nor solely about developments. Rather, a visible thread runs through these articles that concerns democratic ideology and new media, in contexts other than a capitalist system. While state/society and public/private conflicts concerning the media system are now less controversial in western countries (Hurwitz), they remain crucial in developing nations. This is evident in Cuba, where the spread of the new media technological bundle was and still is strongly linked to cold-war dynamics. Cultural and political issues with the acceptance of the IT package means that Internet-infused democracy is unthinkable (Venegas). Whether new media systems can penetrate autochthonous political cultures is however controversial. In Peru, voice over IP, kiosks and Internet cafes, Clayton Powell argues, do export western culture, its structures and contents, in opposition to totalitarian control: the Internet is the new jazz. Partly because the Internet is an emanation of the forces of globalisation/neo-colonisation, its acceptance and use is inherently problematic (Jakubowicz). This is evident in relation with 'race'. The Internet-as-global-system interacts with race-as-global-system on multiple levels: infrastructure (who controls), hierarchy of contents (who decides), audiences (who can access) and strategies uses (what can be done). This encounter yields unpredictable outcomes for the re-location of race. However, the same tensions arise from television's new media practices, such as multi-cultural, non racial, public access programming in South Africa, that try to grant equality of access to public discourse to traditionally excluded sectors (Dowson). Sadly, most accounts agree that once the nation state is willing to grant media power back to citizens, especially from deprived constituencies, the forces of privatisation and globalisation may mean that this is impractical, or even impossible.

If anything, and this is the last theme of the book, new media take the innovation baton from traditional media, print and broadcast, and take it further (last section: *News and Information in the digital age*). In other words, television and the press were already evolving, globalising, becoming interactive before the advent of the Internet. The CNN, MTV and other broadcasters, for instance, already allowed for the integration of national public spheres, a process of 'trans-localisation' of news via innovative programming such as the *World Report* (Volkmer). 'Resource journalism' for instance, based on deeper information resources, clearly labelled diverse opinions and interactive access by the public originates in PBS television programming (Hume). The Internet – the latest available 'technology of the public' – has exacerbated the increasing frequency of news production, circulation and consumption, which have helped displace *space* in favour of *time* in the construction of social reality (Hartley). Via new media, publics are 'called into being' at an increasing speed, as frequency become a more useful concept than content in signifying reality. Although news gate-keeping remains in place, Harper argues, the Internet opens the gates of the traditional media in many significant respects. It eludes the time-span of traditional news circulation; it allows for non-linear storytelling; it reshapes the concept of news 'consonance', allowing for more noise to filter; and it alters the rules of news composition, in favour of more editorial cooperation. Huesca and Dervin shift the focus on the consumption of such hyper-textual news. What users appreciate most are the enlarged space of new media news, the control they have on the information, and the new role of journalist in 'verbing', that is mapping information contexts and engaging in social dialogue with audiences. However, the authors agree, this process is not without pains, as journalists and media workers need to acquire a range of skill to complement traditional 'objectivity' in fact reporting.

In conclusion, running through the book, perhaps providing the book's backbone, is the idea that the Internet is an 'institution', on a par with states and markets. This it is meant a set of rules, protocols and practices that both limit and enable political behaviour. Importantly, the book does away with the Utopian/dystopian dispute on the import of new media, while retaining a fresh understanding of the political value of technologies, not resorting to 'normalisation' theses. Surprisingly, the book is mostly about individuals and small groups, whereas parties, NGOs and government are largely absent. Ironically, it evokes, at least in this reader, the idea of 'insitutionless' democracy via new media, a proposition that most contributors would (and do) vigorously deny. In terms of organisation, the book has a problem with balance. The second and third sections may look like corollaries of the first section, both in terms of contents and in terms of structure. The four chapters in *Global developments*, particularly, are rather thin ground on which to base a section of such a hefty book. In terms of contents, it is media practitioners, policy-makers and technologists who provide the most insightful analyses included in this volume. On the down side, a clear limit is that a minority of the contributions introduce new evidence, none of which is systematic. That is where academics traditionally step in. Checking the volume against the stated aims of the *Media in Transition series*, the book is accessible, relatively comparative and largely historical. If anything, the book is *too* accessible. It is not strictly comparative, as the term is understood in most disciplines. While America is obviously prominent, comparison is more easily found within than across single contributions. Histories of new media and media systems abound, which testifies the continued need to chart the territory. As Hartley noted, new technologies are seldom revolutionary: they become more so with time and use. Therefore, although the volume may not have been designed with students in mind, the book makes a useful addition to the teacher's shelf. Most of the contributions provide an easy way into many aspects of new media and democracy in established and new democracies, with further insights in the role of the Internet in digitalising the fourth estate. Also, the book is a worthy ride for any scholar concerned with the communication of politics, old and new, and with media and democracy.

However, those readers who are mainly interested in ICTs for development or in specific aspects of news and network regulation should probably look elsewhere.

Campaigning online. The Internet in US elections. Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN: 0-19-515156-9 (pbk.).

The 2000 US Presidential election was remarkable for reasons of politics and for reasons of communication. Concerning politics, a third candidate (Nader) was a winner who failed to win the popular vote, while results in Florida were too close to call. These anomalies will eventually turn into historical anecdotes and footnotes. Possibly, the reason why these elections were remarkable in terms of communication will have a more enduring impact. As in the 2000 elections, the Internet, and especially political Web sites played an unprecedented role, only a little exaggeration is needed to claim that a new medium was born.

Bimber and Davis have set these elections, and the accompanying campaign as the backdrop of their study into 'Campaigning Online'. The book's main aim is to gather and analyze empirical data in a systematic, scientific fashion in order to draw factual conclusions on the state of the Internet and campaigns for electoral office. With this, they try to dispel the myths still surrounding this new medium in 2003: the idea that the Internet is revolutionizing politics, and that it has a decentralizing, disintermediating effect that is potentially harmful to democracy. Using a combination of content analysis, expert interviews and a large sample survey in Missouri they succeed in this task. In addition, the accessibility and clarity of their writing make this book almost a page-turner for the communication scholar. All questions one could possibly ask about the Internet in the election campaign – how the candidates used it, how the citizens responded – are given fact-based answers that satisfy traditional scholarly criteria.

The book revolves around the central question: is it 'Reinforcement' or 'Renewal' of election campaigns by digital means? Four subsequent chapters discuss the evolution of candidate communication in historical terms, the candidate approaches to election web sites, what audiences do with election web sites, and whether the web sites have any consequences for them. Eventually Bimber and Davis make a strong statement by answering the question as an example of unequivocal *Reinforcement*. Although Chapter 2 on the evolution of candidate communication may have been an excuse to dive back into the history of political campaigns, the authors concentrate on the use of media in the 1990s. They take the opportunity to elaborate on the development of campaigning on television and in newspapers, and re-tell the story of George W. Bush kissing Oprah Winfrey, and the jokes about David Letterman's heart surgery. They also elaborate on the complex relation between television and newspapers on the one hand and Web sites on the other, seen as related to each other. Since the Missouri 2000 elections play a central role in this study, a little background on the distinctiveness of the political situation in that state is provided. In addition to the Presidential campaign, there was a Senatorial campaign in which one of the candidates died in a plane crash weeks before the election. Bimber and Davis give an insightful account of what happened during the remainder of that campaign.

Chapter 3 considers the way in which candidates approach election Web sites. The authors argue that the Internet is not simply plopped into an election campaign, but makes an integral part of political communication strategies. Political communication, they argue, goes beyond the sum of public opinion figures to embrace the wider process of communication of the campaign. In turn, this is not one monolithic block, but is composed of three intertwined paths, concerning the role of the parties, the importance of issues and the relevance of 'image' The candidates' use of campaign Web sites is thus contingent on the candidates' presentation of self and on the potential audience. It turns out that the

target audiences for Web sites are not so much the undecided voters, but rather the already 'converted'. To this reader this is perfectly reasonable, given the characteristics of the Internet as a medium to which citizens have to turn themselves actively.

Concerning self-presentation, candidates stress four aspects of their identity: the personal, their qualifications, their identification with others and the issues they stand for. In this respect, George Bush was found to have done a better job than Al Gore, as his homepage made a more consistent impression than Gore's. While Bush portrayed himself as a leader, Gore was busy getting rid of his 'wooden demeanor'. However, Gore offered a personal touch with 'his' responses to a bulletin board, where visitors were invited to ask questions. The communication team answered these questions in a style that was definitely Gore's, frequently using the words "I" and "me". The authors then claim that it was Ralph Nader who made a more targeted use of the Web. Because he could not present himself as a leader with a long time record of governing experience, he established through the website his expertise in setting up and running public interest groups. In his issue presentation, Nader fought an online battle with Gore with a prominently section on 'Gore's Broken Promise of the Day'. Based on the historical reconstruction of campaigning provided in the opening chapters, the authors are able to compare the presentation style over the last election campaigns. They conclude that the Internet enables candidates to file faster responses, refutes and rebuttals of the opponents' statements, thus leading to a more negative way of campaigning.

After examining candidate's online performance, in Chapter 4 and 5 the authors present data on the use citizens made of campaign Web sites, and the consequences it could have for them. Very sobering is the finding that Bush's Web site only attracted 5% of all American citizens, while Gore's Web site came second with 4%, and Nader third with 2%. While a certain amount of crossover is reported, i.e. people visiting more than one website, this was fairly minor, and, perhaps not surprisingly, mostly limited to undecided voters. The main reason why citizens visit candidates' Web sites is also rather mundane: to browse through all that is there. The authors thus dampen many of the most optimistic expectations that the Internet may have a great influence on citizens' knowledge, attitudes and voting behaviour. However, many of the visitors also reported the impression that they had learned something by visiting a Web site. This, in its turn, strongly correlated with a more positive attitude towards the candidate. However marginal, campaign websites may have some effects on citizens' attitudes.

In Chapter 6, appropriately titled 'Reinforcement', the authors offer their conclusions. By reference to the preceding chapters, they combine all the knowledge they have gained and come to the empirically sound (and plausible) conclusion that Web sites in campaigns are mainly about reinforcement of support. Theoretically, this is then linked back to well known concepts from communication studies such as agenda setting and priming. Bimber and Davis claim that candidates' Web sites provoke three effects: citizens become aware of issues, they gain knowledge, and they have easier access to alternative, minor parties. However, these effects apply only to those who are already engaged. Their conclusion that minor parties like Nader's of Buchanan's will not benefit the leverage they need from the Internet is in line with the empirical evidence from the preceding chapters. In the concluding pages the authors concede that their finding weak evidence of any electoral effects of the Internet is likely to satisfy no one. Therefore, they formulate some expectations for the role of the Internet in future elections, mainly that the Internet will solidify as a form of niche communication and that it will offer campaigns tools for mobilizing activists. However, we should envisage no gigantic mobilization of voters, as the gap between political activists and the population at large is likely to broaden and deepen.

With *Campaigning Online* Bimber and Davis have written a highly readable account of the role of the Internet in the 2000 campaign. They present conclusions that are not only plausible, but also based on

systematic study. In my opinion, this book may serve as a model and stepping stone for a series of books to be published in the coming years concerning online elections. Unfortunately, the authors will not write an update based on the 2004 elections, which combines the intentions of the candidates with citizens behaviour. Such a scholarly but readable book would have summed up nicely the state of knowledge about the internet in a far more exciting (Internet) campaign: Howard Dean's dependence on the Internet and his failure to keep the momentum, the Republican's extensive use of database technologies, and Moveon.org grassroots efforts. Such a book could also have expanded on the perceived rise in influence of the Internet by way of the blogs. However, this is not to claim that other equally worthy accounts of the 2004 election may not emerge, following in this books' steps. Contributions such as this provide a well-informed reading for communication scholars and should be no less than obligatory reading for the scholars who see campaigns merely, as the authors put it, as a 'collection of public opinion figures'.

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