

Digital Dissent, Satire, and Blogs: Tactics of Media Resistance after 9/11:
Chair: Dr. Paul D. Boin, Dr. Mark Lipton

Ironic Citizenship and Complicity in Spectacular Society

- Dr. Megan Boler (Theory and Policy Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto)

In this paper, I begin by offering a brief overview of our three-year research project of digital dissent (described above), using short clips from Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* and examples of the MoveOn.org Bush in 30 Seconds 2004 Campaign Contest to illustrate the discourses around truth and lies expressed by publics frustrated with media and politicians complicity within the corporate media landscape.

I then focus on one strand of our data analyses—the use of irony as a tactic of resistance and means of coping with complicity in the spectacular society. I draw on short visual quicktime movie clips and interviews we have conducted with blog and viral video producers to argue that irony functions as a crucial tactic of resistance within a landscape of media spectacle and our own complicity within spectacular society. Drawing on theoretical work of Debord, Claire Colebrook (2004), Linda Hutcheon (1989) and Foucault, I argue that in an era marked by the spectacle of the “war on terror” what we are faced with is “coping with complicity in spectacular society” (Debord 1967; 1989). Tactical media and practices of digital dissent represent a plurality of activities that demonstrate how we cope with and productively recuperate our complicity in spectacular society. Because we tend to recognize the immense planetary problems created through the structures of global capitalism and its attendant state institutions (not to mention the media itself), our reality is inevitably one of complicity. However, this complicity, when accompanied by an ironic approach to truth and politics, engenders a correlative critique of spectacular relations and offers the potential for thinking new possible relations within the social and political registers (Foucault 1980). I conclude by posing questions to the audience about the appeal of political satire and “fake news” and their implication as effective tactics of resistance in a time of war.

Works Cited

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Calling on the Colbert Nation: Fan Practices and Resistance to Corporate Media Powers

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Recent studies of fan culture suggest that fans are creating new forms of community with profound implications for democracy, citizenship and political organization. Henry Jenkins (2006), for example, applies Pierre Levy's theory of "collective intelligence" to argue that fan practices can be read as an "alternative source of media power" (p. 4), while Liesbit van Zoonen (2005) observes parallels between fans and the ideal citizens of a deliberative democracy. My own research into the intense fan activity that has accumulated around Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report* suggests that fan practices are considerably more socially and politically ambiguous, and often contradictory in their positioning vis-à-vis corporate media powers. In online discussions, fans often perform sophisticated critiques of corporate media consolidation and representations in general, and of Viacom's digital practices in particular. In response to the 2007 "YouTube purges," for example, fans acted quickly and collectively to create an archive of a program they interpreted as culturally and politically meaningful, and one which, significantly, parodies right-wing media personalities. At the same time, much of this fan activity takes place on official, corporate-sponsored pages, not only generating revenue for corporate media, but keeping the spectacular commodity firmly at the centre of social relations. As part of the larger "Rethinking Media, Democracy and Citizenship" research project, this paper provides close readings of the varied fan activities that surround and intersect with *The Colbert Report* – including the production of fan videos, the circulation of clips, and the creation of archives and blogs – as a means of inquiring into the political and resistant nature of fan practices in a complex digital media environment marked by consolidating powers and emergent uses.

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Politics for Consumption: How Bloggers Feed the War Machine

- Andréa Schmidt (Independent journalist and researcher, currently working with the CBC)

In the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, blogs about the war proliferated. American soldiers, indy journalists, armchair pundits, tenured Arabists, and Iraqis themselves posted hundreds of thousands of words using self-publishing software. This proliferation was heralded in many quarters – and particularly in the mainstream media -- as evidence of new media's democratic potential. But the question of the political significance of these interventions remains undecided. And on closer examination, the bloggers reveal competing conceptions of politics and political agency that undermine unequivocal claims that they represent either a deepening of democratic discourse or effective tactical resistance to the US imperial war narrative. Drawing on interviews with almost twenty 'war bloggers' carried out as part of the "Rethinking Media, Democracy, and Citizenship project," this paper will show how bloggers articulate a conception of politics modeled on consumer choice, with its accompanying individualism and brand

fetishization. I will argue that this model forecloses the potential for the kind of radical political positioning – politics understood as a way of life – able to challenge dominant narratives and structures as it seeks out and puts new and collective tactics into practice.