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## Editorial

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The present volume makes an attempt to open a critical dialogue on issues raised by alternative political and media practices. Though neither alternative media can be fully addressed as ‘conveyors’ of political practice, nor alternative political practices do necessarily ‘employ’ media practices, their ‘fusion’ sheds light on critical aspects of the dialectic relation between democratic process and communication.

Alternative media and alternative political practice are rather neglected fields of enquiry, pushed aside by a more active concern with the mass media and mainstream politics. To an extent, the advent of the Internet seems to have resuscitated academic interest in these fields, as new communication technologies are thought to favor looser and marginalized political groups which in turn try to make the most of the potential afforded by the internet. It is thus hardly surprising that most of the contributions to this issue focus on the use of new communication technologies either for social movement mobilization or for spreading ‘viral’ political and humorous messages or even for producing and transmitting alternative radio.

On a more theoretical level, the common threads that tie all these contributions together are a concern with the meaning and value of alternative media, as well as an emphasis on political practice as a key aspect for the enactment of citizenship. This active understanding of citizenship perceives social movements, activists and alternative media as prominent ‘agents’ in a never-ending process of defining and altering social and political identities, whereby practice, ‘lived experience’ and individual participation hold a central position. Thus, instead of judging the effects and value of media solely on the basis of their audience size, this approach considers media as a locus for the production of political identities. In that respect, alternative media offer the opportunity for more active participation in politics, as their often amateur nature blurs the line between producer and consumer. Related to this is a stronger concern with the political potential of more interpersonal or individual means of communication as opposed to the mass media.

Again, the Internet seems to have played a role in this shift of interest, as new communication technologies have expanded the scale of interpersonal communication and provided more outlets for media such as blogs, webzines and email lists.

The evaluation of 'alternative' media in terms of their 'lived experience' is taken up by Vatikiotis in his account of relevant practices. The historiography of different theories that contest mass communication highlights various arenas where the democratization of communication has been addressed. Further elaboration on diverse cases of small-scale 'alternative' media projects points out different fields, characteristics, applications, and 'moments' of the communication process that the implementation of such projects challenges. Overall, the consideration of heterogeneous 'alternative' media in relation to their 'lived experience', meaning the way social actors, agents, experience their engagement in/with them, sets a framework for the evaluation of the practice of such projects (alongside their fluidity and complexity) as instances of the 'enactment of citizenship', advancing also an understanding of the notion of the 'political' and its constitution.

Probing into the actual practice of alternative media, Coyer provides an account of people's engagement in the production of projects that advance new communication spaces. She focuses on the case of Indymedia Radio which is discussed in relation to the convergence of online and traditional broadcast mediums. In that respect, the new avenues of distribution created across the online and analogue realms, facilitating audio content sharing on the web for progressive groups, have advanced new forms of interaction between local collectives and the global network of Indymedia. Changes in both the content and structure of such projects are viewed in tandem with the process of building nets of communication between local and global networks, drawing together communities of geography and communities of interest.

Humorous protest email (against U.S. President George W. Bush in the year preceding his re-election) sets another paradigm of alternative media practice, pointing out the individualistic nature of engagement in political communication as well. Scott discusses the distributive use, quotidian nature, and cultural, creative manifestations of email-based protests ('virals'). In this context, individuals are not conceptualised as mere components of an 'audience', but as media organizations themselves, creating, producing and distributing content, being thus entitled to every of aspect of the communication process. As such, the dissemination of creative protests by individuals through email-based practices constitutes another struggle area for a liberal democratic political communications system.

The evaluation of the use of communication means and practices in the 'movement for alternative globalization' provided by Kavada sets interesting

questions in regard to the role of communication and interaction in processes of mobilization and participation. Firstly, such an approach challenges social movement studies and their areas of interest concerning collective action (instrumentality, ideology, identity) to incorporate such considerations into their research field. In addition, the investigation of the employment of the internet as a crucial means in the mobilization for the Paris 2003 European Social Forum highlighted further aspects of the relationship between different modes of communication, their interplay and articulation, within different mobilization contexts. In this way, such a research points out the need for acknowledging the vital role of media and communication within social movement activity.

Though not articulated within the discussion developed above, Goodwin's article offers a challenging, 'alternative', reading of the relation between media and politics', investigating 'government interference' in the editorial life of the BBC.

Therefore, the papers that follow probe into a diversity of features and aspects of alternative political and media practices. Although their starting point may differ, they all raise interlinked questions concerning the capturing and understanding of the 'double democratization' of politics and communication.