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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

YOUNG SCHOLARS AT THE 2010 EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE

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Under the overarching theme of *Transcultural Communication – Intercultural Comparisons*, the 2010 European Communication Conference (ECC 2010) organised by the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) in Hamburg brought together more than 1,000 participants from a wide range of media and communication disciplines. Within 17 thematic sections, scholars from Europe and beyond presented their current research. Among them were many interesting presentations by young scholars. A selection of these papers is presented in this special issue of *PLATFORM* edited by the management team of the Young Scholars' Network of the European Communication Research and Education Association (YECREA).

As the Young Scholars' Network of ECREA, YECREA aims to provide a network specifically for the young generation of media and communication scholars working in Europe (*young* here refers to an early career stage rather than to age and includes—but is not limited to—doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers), and give them a voice within ECREA. The network's goals are to provide young scholars with relevant information, to organise and stimulate workshops and other initiatives aimed at PhD support, and to create forums where young scholars can share ideas, get peer support and peer review. In addition, YECREA aims to provide a bridge between the young generation and the senior members of ECREA in terms of stimulating both communication and collaboration between the two. A 'representation system' of YECREA's representatives in different ECREA thematic sections, temporary working groups and in different European countries is of crucial importance in achieving these goals. The YECREA network connects through the community portal—YECREA website (www.yecrea.eu), a mailing list, and a Facebook group. YECREA is also present at workshops and conferences that are organised by ECREA or its sections and where young scholars can meet each other as well as senior scholars in person. The biennial ECREA-organised European Communication Conference (ECC) is the largest

such event—and it is this event that represents the basis of this special issue.

This YECREA special issue of *PLATFORM* presents a collections of articles based on papers presented at the 2010 European Communication Conference (ECC 2010). The articles address the role of the media—traditional mass media, mainstream online (digital) media, and computer games—in contemporary society and can be divided into two main themes: (1) collective identity and identification; and (2) facilitating democratic involvement. From different theoretical and empirical points of view, the articles point to the interrelationships between the media, cultural identifications and democratic involvement. The articles explore the ways in which practices around the media, whether traditional mass media, mainstream online media or computer games, can come to influence and are influenced by cultural affinities and local contexts.

In relation to the theme of *the formation of collective identities and identification*, the first two articles address the role and social implications of new forms of digital and social media. In her article on e-sport, Maric argues that although competitive computer gaming as a new social form has a capacity to transcend national territorial boundaries as well as traditional gender roles, territorial belonging remains significant. However, it can be negotiated for pro-gaming contexts, practices and groups. Gender remains relevant in that it structures the world of e-sports. Kaprāns also explores territorially bounded formations in a transnational and transcultural context. In his analysis of transnational audiences'/users' comments on videos of the satirical character Borat on YouTube, Kaprāns identifies the character as a 'deterritorialized' media character, but finds that discourses of national identity play a central role in users' shared meaning-making.

In relation to the theme *facilitating democratic involvement*, the latter two articles explore political television program formatting and social class and online media. Focusing on public service broadcasting, De Smedt and Bouckaert explore how Dutch-speaking and French-speaking public broadcasters in Belgium have responded differently to the increasingly competitive context in which they operate. The authors reflect on how different formats relate to the role of a political journalist and the position of 'ordinary people' in television programs on elections, as well as on their potential and problematic implications for the democratic role of public broadcasters. While exploring the potential of the internet for reducing class inequality, Danielsson argues that the potential of digital media does not translate into bringing to an end the enduring inequalities of class among young men in Sweden. He concludes that young men from different socio-economic backgrounds understand the internet in different ways: 'middle class' young men use the internet as a resource for learning, networking and producing content, while 'working class' young men use it as a space for entertainment, seemingly without realising its potential as an (alternative) form of education.

In addition to the articles, this special issue presents a report of the YECREA workshop 'Planning an academic career: International perspectives' organised at the ECC 2010. At the workshop, organised and chaired by Ranjana Das and Julie Uldam, scholars from different countries and at different stages of their career (Uwe Hasebrink, Nico Carpentier, Saila Poutiainen, Elena Vartanova, Nuria Simelio, Michele Sorice, Roberto Suarez, Tomáš Trampota, and Tamara Witschge) discussed early academic career dilemmas, mobility, and planning while drawing on their personal experiences. The workshop created great interest and was attended by more than 100 participants, which is a solid indication that many young (but also more senior) scholars struggle with the issues of whether and how to plan an academic career, what balance to strike between publishing, teaching, and other activities, and how to find one's way in the European academic landscape and beyond during and

after the PhD.

ELECTRONIC SPORT: HOW PRO-GAMING NEGOTIATES TERRITORIAL BELONGING AND GENDER

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Abstract: The article explores the phenomenon of electronic sport (e-sport), which refers to organised and competitive video gaming. It is approached as a 'social world' and a specific culture of gaming, which produces organised groups, events and broadcasting. Located at the intersection of gaming and sports, e-sport adopts elements from both areas. From a grounded theory perspective, the article discusses the contexts, meanings and practices of pro-gaming within e-sport as researched in a study consisting of semi-structured interviews with e-sport fans, gamers, journalists and team managers and observation of e-sport events and clubhouses. The results point out that territorial belonging and gender remain relevant for pro-gaming. Both can inspire belonging and result in exclusions or inclusions. But while territorial belonging is adopted as a flexible practice, gender is structuring gaming within e-sport.

Keywords: pro-gaming, gender, territoriality, e-sport, negotiation, social form

Electronic sport (e-sport) refers to organised and competitive video gaming. The relatively young phenomenon can be dated back to the end of the 1990s when the first online gaming leagues[1] emerged. Up to then, public gaming took place offline using a Local Area Network (LAN) at so-called LAN-parties or LAN-events[2]. In 2008, 78 countries were represented at the World Cyber Games (WCG) and participants competed for a total of $470,000 of prize money. Examples of popular e-sport games are the first person shooter *Counter-strike 1.6* and the real-time strategy game *Warcraft 3*. E-sport is neither restricted to one game nor to one game genre, but unites various gaming communities.

In addition, e-sport, like traditional sport, is not only about competitions and athletes, but is also about audiences, fans and broadcasting. Within e-sport, a passion for games and competitive gaming is not exclusively expressed through competing. E-sport fans cheer for their favourite teams at events and watch broadcasted matches online. Others take part in e-sport by working in not yet salaried positions such as team managers, 'shout-casters' providing play-by-play commentary or editors-in-chief. Ambitious gamers follow

their passion by taking part in organised competitions and by becoming pro-gamers (professional gamers who via contract, receive regular financial support from a team). As pro-gamers, players not only compete for prize money, sponsoring and media attention but also for fan support and social status.

By approaching e-sport as an emerging cultural and social formation, the relationship between mediated communication and culture can be examined. From this perspective, e-sport cannot be reduced to a particular gaming activity but refers to a whole "social world" (Shibutani, 1955; Strauss, 1978) of shared practices, contexts and meanings. Within this social world, media take a threefold role: as *sports* (to perform and to compete through gaming); as *infrastructure* (to meet and to compete online); and as *broadcaster* (to be informed and entertained as audience). Hence, media provides both content and form of e-sport.

In order to examine the role of media for e-sport, this article concentrates on professional gaming (pro-gaming) because it is a central media practice of e-sport. The term 'media practice' refers to "media-oriented practices" (Couldry 2004, p.121). Hence, these practices go beyond consumption practices. An analysis of media practices promises new insights into what people *do*, *say* and *think* in relation to media (Couldry 2004). By using semi-structured interviews with e-sport fans, gamers, journalists and team managers and observation of e-sport events and clubhouses, the article will discuss the findings of an empirical study based on the principles of grounded theory. The analysis points out that the way pro-gaming is understood, contextualised and practiced within e-sport needs to be framed within a broader social context of territoriality and gender. Whereas territorial belonging does not organise all contexts of pro-gaming, dominant gender relations are structuring pro-gaming.

INTRODUCING CENTRAL CONCEPTS:

SOCIAL FORM, MEDIA PRACTICE, TERRITORIALITY AND GENDER

Mediated communication is understood here as a specific form of human action. It is not reduced to the transport of information, but conceptualised as a complex process of meaning-making which is situated in cultural and social contexts. The use of media is not understood as functionalistic but as integrated in our everyday life and in our specific cultural situation.

Mediated communication, understood as a form of human action, points out that media gain relevance through human actions, which refer to media (Krotz, 2009 p.26). In order to research what people do, say and think in relation to media, it is productive to analyse their "media-oriented practices" (Couldry 2004, p.121). Media practices help us to understand that different spaces and practices exist in relation to media and that different meanings can be given to one media text (e.g. one video game). To approach e-sport from this perspective allows moving beyond the analysis of reception and production of games. The analysis presented here concentrates on how pro-gaming is socially organised through practices (of constructing gaming squads, contexts[3] and game play) and how these practices produce (and reproduce) social relations. To focus on media practices helps to grasp what people are actually doing with games and what social arena gaming produces.

The term 'social form' is used as an open and process-oriented concept for researching social relationships (e.g. groups, networks, communities), which produce meaning and are based on a feeling of belonging. Gender and territorial belonging represent two aspects, which can inspire belonging and result in inclusions/exclusions. According to Hitzler (1995, p.160) and Beck (1997, p.91) new social forms are able to overcome social classifications such

as class or gender. Whereas traditional communities were linked to central institutions of society, such as the king or the pope, modern social forms produce increasingly independent systems of meaning (Luckmann, 1978, pp.276-279). They can become independent from society's central institutions and from their stabilising gender constructions (Hitzler et al., 2005, p.36). These forms are also said to have less clear expectations towards their participants and therefore to be more open concerning the experiences participants can gain (Hitzler et al., 2005, p.37). For these reasons, new social forms are understood as having the potential to dissolve traditional gender roles (Hitzler et al., 2005, p.36).

In addition, social forms are increasingly relying on media for communicating to each other, for organising gatherings, for sharing experiences, and so on. As a consequence, these forms seem to be less bound by territory and more by communication (see Shibutani, 1955, p. 566). This transgression of boundaries can be conceptualised as communicative deterritorialisation (Hepp, 2002, pp.867-874). For example, online communication combined with gaming practices can encourage new social forms such as online gaming groups, which represent deterritorialised forms of belonging. John Tomlinson (2000, p.148) emphasises that "[w]here there is deterritorialization there is also reterritorialization". According to him the process of reterritorialisation involves "various attempts to re-establish a cultural 'home'" (Tomlinson, 2000, p.148). Beck (2002, p.29), on the other hand, suggests distinguishing between "national manifestation" and "cosmopolitan reality" in order to emphasise that our experiential space no longer corresponds with national space. Thus, we have to ask if a recontextualisation of gaming within local settings already points to the process of building a new cultural home as suggested by Tomlinson (1999) or if it is merely a national manifestation of cosmopolitan reality.

As media offer new experiential spaces, which do not only cross territories but also transgress cultural boundaries (Hepp, 2002, pp. 867-874), the question arises whether as a result of the cultural transgression these emerging spaces are constructed through new cultural meanings, practices and contexts and whether they are able to challenge previous cultural constructions such as traditional gender roles.

Moi (2001) understands gender as a central classification which structures the entire social field and therefore cannot be so easily overcome. She suggests conceptualising it in a similar way as Bourdieu (1998, p.32) understands class. She stresses that gender is "a particularly *combinatory* social category, one that infiltrates and influences every other category" (Moi, 2001, p.288, emphasis in original). The power of gender becomes visible as soon as gender actions such a structuring force. Following Butler (1988, p.525) gender is conceptualised as a performance constituted through acts, which refer to "a shared experience and 'collective action'". This conceptualisation points out that gender constitutes not merely an individual act. Hence, gender could also be understood as a shared practice. Media offer a space for communicative action where gender can be (re)constructed but also deconstructed. Therefore, gender is not understood here as a *force* which automatically structures mediated communication, but as a practice which can be performed through mediated communication and which can structure other social practices.

In summary, the article approaches e-sport as a new social form and focuses on the aspect of territoriality and gender. The analysis of media practices promises new insights into the role of media and how gaming is practiced, contextualised and understood with regard to social classifications.

The research takes into consideration that what constitutes a media practice depends on people understanding a set of actions as a distinct practice. It is not the researcher who decides what a media practice is and how it is socially organised. The aim is to develop a theory about competitive and organised gaming by relying on data and not on closed theoretical systems or meta-theories from which explanations for empirical contexts are deduced. Grounded theory is an adequate methodology because this methodological approach promises to arrive at a theory derived from the data (Krotz, 2005, p.169; Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.12).

From 2008 to 2010 data was collected using qualitative interviews, participant and non-participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three team managers (labelled D, U, W), five professional gamers (labelled A, G, N, P, S), four e-sport fans (labelled K, L, M, R) and two e-sport journalists (labelled T, B). Interview respondents were initially contacted via e-mail, and then interviewed face-to-face within an e-sport context (event, boot camp, clubhouse) in order to gain additional insight into the context. After face-to-face interviews the interview partners were contacted again via e-mail in order to clarify remaining questions.

Offline observation was chosen as an additional method because it allows gaining insights into the contexts interview partners referred to during their interviews. Moreover, it enables the researcher to note actions and practices that interview partners are not aware of. During the events, the researcher took part in all activities offered to visitors without concealing the research interest.

Participant observation took place at three e-sport events: one national (E-sport Professional Series, 2009) and two international events (World Cyber Games, 2008 and the E-sport World Cup, 2010). Additional non-participant observations occurred at steady offline representations of two professional teams. Observing and interviewing always informed each other. Observations helped to contextualise interviews and gain insights at the relevant practices. The observations also contributed to the set of questions posed during the semi-structured interviews.

The chosen methodology demands that data collection and analysis should continually inform each other (Corbin and Strauss, 1998, p. 201). Preliminary knowledge and the research question helped to chose the first interview partners and observations. The gained insights informed the next sample of data. With the help of this 'theoretical sampling' (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.203), interview partners and observations were chosen more and more selectively in order to contrast previous data, but also in order to test early theory fragments. Concepts derived from the data such as 'territoriality' and 'gender' informed the selection of the next data sample. As a result, events for observation were varied according to gender (male and female league) and territoriality (national and international).

Interview transcriptions and observation protocols were at first open coded. Open coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008, pp.160) allows labelling, breaking down and comparing the data. The codes were derived from the data and then structured and organised around categories including 'recruitment practices', 'social connectivity', 'organisational structure' and 'professional training practices'. In a next step, axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.229) was used to find out how categories relate to each other. For example it was tested if and how 'gender' relates to the category 'professional training practices'. Based on the relations found between categories, the next step was to construct a hierarchy of categories through selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.143). As a result, it was possible to differentiate between different types of e-sport teams categorised as the 'company', 'the fam-

ily' and 'the interest group'. In addition, selective coding contributes to finding the "core category" (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.146), which can be related to all other categories (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.147). The results point out that the adopted 'social role' is responsible for how e-sport is experienced and practiced as a social form. To each role specific media practices, media contexts and meanings correspond. This article will concentrate on pro-gaming because it is a central media practice within e-sport. It does not only contribute to the construction of 'social roles' but also organises other e-sport practices (e.g. how game play is understood, how gaming squads are built).

E-SPORT GAMING: NEGOTIATING TERRITORIAL BELONGING

In order to understand pro-gaming within e-sport, it is necessary to look at the teams and events because they do not only pre-organise gaming within e-sport, but also offer relevant gaming contexts to the 'pro-gamer'. With regard to territorial orientation and connectivity we can differentiate between three types of teams. The 'family' adopts territorial belonging as identity and focuses on social ties within the team. The 'interest group' has a national orientation by anchoring itself within a city and tries to connect to central institutions of society. The 'company' represents a transnational orientation and focuses on connectivity with e-sport.

LOCAL, NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL GAMING SQUADS

Within all three types of teams, the recruitment of professional gamers is not restricted to one territorial area. Teams unite gamers who belong to and are located in different countries. But for the 'family' to build local gaming squads remains desirable:

> … on this level of performance, it does not work, this can be compared to the FC Bayern [professional football club] or others, they surely would play with eleven persons from Munich if they could, but it does not work like this[4]. (team manager, male U)

In addition to that, a desire for reterritorialisation is connected to a desire for the 'familiar' and for sharing more than only a passion for gaming:

> Of course there are especially international clans [teams] which also sign up international gamers but I am not very enthusiastic about it because there are always language barriers and it is also a question of one´s mindset. (team manager, male U)

Within the 'interest group' a steady offline representation is used to actually build local gaming squads where all members share one locality,

> We really like to have gaming squads made up of Cologne residents who can really train here in the clubhouse, we did that for example with our Counter-strike Source squad. (team manager, male D)

However, when the team manager compares the local squad to other translocal squads, he understands the local one as less professional:

> Some squads are more professional […] that is what we realised with our Counter-strike Source squad, the squad from Cologne, during their training they were still chatting here and chatting

there, and there was a little bit more fun whereas our 1.6 [Counter-strike 1.6.] gaming squad, they are really training, they really close all messenger programmes and then they are intensely focused. (team manager, male D)

Unlike the 'family', the reason for building local gaming squads is not based on the desire to embody a territorial identity, but explained as a means for improving the social dimension of pro-gaming:

…so that they see each other not only online but also offline, as a result friendships are more likely to emerge and you can avoid problems much easier than by talking online without seeing each other, the respect also grows and the anonymity disappears when you sit across from each other. (team manager, male D)

The formation of local pro-gaming squads, however, still represents an exception within e-sport.

Moreover, territorial belonging also seems to be relevant for the e-sport events. But even though international events such as the ESWC (E-Sport World Cup) and the WCG (World Cyber Games) stage the battle of nations, from the point of view of the pro-gamer, being able to represent one´s team can be more important than representing a nation:

You do not represent your team anymore at the World Cyber Games, at the ESWC you really play with your tricot [...] you really see that these six persons belong together, you do not see here [WCG] if they really play together in a team or not and I think that is much nicer at the ESWC. (pro-gamer, female G)

Concerning team-games, the national team is not newly formed, but represented by an already existing gaming squad. This practice has been established because

…to form a complete new gaming squad, that would, I believe, take a lot of more time than is given to you for preparing a tournament. (pro-gamer, male N)

As a result, it is not unusual that the national team is made up of gamers who come from different nations. For example the female gaming squad who won the ESWC 2010 represented Sweden at the tournament, but the gamers are from the USA and Canada. The team they belong to was originally founded in Germany but has offices in Germany and Sweden. Thus, gamers represent one nation, which is associated with their team.

LOCAL, NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL GAMING CONTEXTS

Teams organise two types of offline gaming contexts, namely the 'boot camp' and the LAN. Whereas 'boot camps' offer a pro-gaming context for training purposes, LANs are understood as open-to-all gaming contexts which mainly offer 'leisure gaming'[5]. Within the context of a boot camp, one gaming squad meets offline but trains online with a training partner who usually does not share the same location. Thus, the boot camp represents a translocal gaming context. Within a LAN, however, gamers meet offline and play together within the local area network. In other words, they do not play online and everyone who plays also shares the same location.

For the 'family' LANs are seen as important because they help strengthen social ties between its members. Even the chosen organisational form is understood foremost as a means for facilitating these additional local gaming contexts:

> When you play every day [online] with the same people, at some point you want to get to know them and so we organised our first LAN [Local Area Network] with 150 people and there you have of course income and expenses and you cannot deal with it other than through registering as club and non-profit association [in German: 'Verein'], that was the only reason why we did it [registering as club] back then . (Team manager, male U)

As the organisational form is understood primarily in terms of facilitating local gaming contexts, it becomes clear how important these contexts are for the 'family'.

Furthermore, the 'family' constructs offline pro-gaming contexts as 'homes' for the team. The identity of the team can be expressed through a regular appearance at a national e-sport event, which is located in the region with which the team identifies. The participation at this local gaming context is understood as the team´s home match:

> Our home match is Munich; of course we apply for Munich conventionally but we are ninety nine percent likely to get it. (team manager, male U)

Relatedly, the family-like social orientation is seen in the translocal gaming context of the boot camp, which is transformed from training and pro-gaming context into home:

> I have been with many clans and nowhere were relations as family-like as with TBH [Team Bavaria Heaven] when you come here to the boot camp, you feel immediately like being at home. (pro-gamer, male A)

When compared to the other two types of teams, the 'family' presents a closed social form because it is primarily concerned with strengthening ties within the team and with people close to its members (e.g. family). Even though the 'family' and the 'interest group' share the same organisational form, they do not share the same territorial and social orientations. The 'family' has no political ambitions, whereas the 'interest group' actively promotes competitive gaming towards groups of territorialised cultures (e.g. Germany, Europe). Thus, the 'interest group' understands the organisational form of club and non-profit association as means for political action. One respondent named the common identifying interest which provides a basis for action as follows:

> We have taken over a little bit, let´s say: raising awareness for gaming in the public, even though, the ESB [E-Sport Bund, German e-sport association] exists, but it does not work so well at the moment. (team manager, male D)

Another respondent supported the statement and specified how the team tries to take action:

> Lectures about violence prevention[6] are held here [in the clubhouse], workshops for the parents in order to involve the parents a little bit, the adults and the press and in order to say: if you are

interested in understanding, we give you the opportunity to gain insights. (pro-gamer, female G)

To have steady offline representation in the form of a clubhouse can be perceived as a national orientation, even when the team unites pro-gamers beyond one nation:

We have international ambitions with our professional teams, but also with our club teams, but contrary to let´s say Mousesports or SK Gaming [two other teams] we really have a national focus with our clubhouse. (team manager, male D).

For the 'interest group' the clubhouse is understood as opening up new possibilities for interacting with groups and institutions beyond e-sport. Especially the possibility to situate gaming practices within local contexts such as the clubhouse are understood as attracting political and media attention from central institutions of territorialised cultures:

As a result of the clubhouse, we already had the mayor of Cologne as our guest at the opening ceremony, and the minister of media in Europe or something like that, and as a result we already received relative extensive media exposure. (team manager, male D)

Like the 'family', the 'interest group' attempts to connect to territorialised culture. Both teams are, however, representing different territorial orientations. According to Beck (2002, p.36), "[t]he difference between purely local and cosmopolitan forms of life is that cosmopolitans experience and – if necessary – defend their place as one open to the world." Although it seems questionable if 'purely local' forms exist, it could be argued that the 'family' at least *imagines* itself as a local form and desires reterritorialisation. It rejects parts of e-sport, such as transnational gaming squads by being "not very enthusiastic" about them. By contrary, the 'interest group' represents a cosmopolitan form because it defends its clubhouse as a place open to the deterritorialised world of e-sport as well as to central institutions of territorialised cultures (e.g. national government, national media).

The 'communicative deterritorialisation' (Hepp, 2002) of e-sport becomes particularly apparent when looking at the 'company'. Even though, this type of team has a steady offline representation in the form of an office, it is not used for regular meetings, but for sporadic training sessions, often in conjunction with being at the respective location for other reasons such as competitions. Contrary to the 'family' and the 'interest group', boot camps of the 'company' are not fixed to one specific locality. As training camps are usually held before major competitions, they take place at the location where the competition is held. Therefore, what distinguishes this type of team from the other two is not only its emphasised transnational orientation, but also the flexibility of its local gaming contexts. To have 'mobile' training camps that are not fixed to one location does not aim at constructing one location at the team's centre. In addition, the 'company' does not use these local gaming contexts in order to connect the team to territorialised cultures (e.g. nation or region). Instead, the use of mobile local contexts is able to link the team to the social world of gaming namely its events and competitions.

Pro-gamers within the 'company' type recognise mediated communication as their central means for communication:

In our team we are mostly online, we have a central office in Berlin, where we already played together [...] but we usually com-

municate via the internet. (pro-gamer, male P)

Nevertheless, it remains relevant for pro-gamers of this type of team to meet in off-line gaming contexts. If teams like the 'company' do not organise those contexts, gamers organise contexts themselves:

> The girls all met at my house in Texas and we all hang out there and practiced all together for a week. (pro-gamer, female S)

As we have seen, within all three types of teams, offline gaming contexts are not only used by pro-gamers for training purposes, but also for deepening social relations ("to get to know them", "to hang out"). For a pro-gamer to share an offline context with other gamers does not constitute a regular (weekly or daily) media practice, but an occasional one. It is a media practice which makes it necessary that the dispersed gamers do not only share time but also place. Hence, media practices that are based on sharing locality cannot replace the translocal contexts of online communication and online gaming.

Another pro-gaming context is provided by e-sport events. Territorial belonging is relevant at international events such as the ESWC and the WCG for producing additional symbolic meaning. The WCG uses flag ceremonies to stage the battle of nations. This meaning is not central for participating in the event. Territorial belonging is only an additional element next to the games and the teams which are structuring the event. Participant observations and interviews at those events made clear that especially people new to the idea of e-sport and new to gaming used the presence of flags to understand that some kind of competition is performed. People participating in e-sport as 'pro-gamer', 'organiser' or 'fan' do not primarily make sense of the event as a battle of nations. For them the games, the teams and the gamers generate the meaning necessary to participate, as one e-sport-fan explains:

> I am not so much interested in countries, but more in teams […] actually, I am only following international teams, mTw, Altern-ate, yes, sometimes German gamers sometimes not, they [Altern-ate] also have a Swedish gamer, I believe, those [international teams] are interesting for 1.6 [Counter-strike 1.6] and Source [Counter-strike Source]. (e-sport fan, female L)

A pro-gamer supports this statement by saying:

> It is not my aim to get to know persons from other games, but from my game I want to make contacts [...] the World Cyber Games is really a World Championship where people from all over the world come together, different cultures cross and I am allowed to see again a lot of people who live on a different part of the earth, with the young man from Singapore I was relatively often in contact, he used to be our guide back then in Singapore, he showed and explained everything and now it was the other way around so that we could show him and explain to him. (pro-gamer male P)

But when the favoured game is not represented, visitors can participate by following their national team:

> Actually my main focus is Counter-strike Source which is not represented here [at the WCG] […] so, it does not matter what

game, I play for Germany, I keep my fingers crossed for Germany. (e-sport fan male M)

To adopt territorial belonging allows creating symbolic links beyond the deterritorialised culture of e-sport. Flag ceremonies are especially able to tap into the symbolism of sports events. The celebratory use of elements such as clothes, flags and ceremonies to represent territorial belonging at e-sport events indicate some aesthetic value. But territorial belonging is not necessary for making sense of the e-sport competition.

Following Beck (2002, p.30) who recognises the "transformation of localities" as one central feature of globalisation, we can add that the specific social orientation of the team shapes its appropriation of locality and of offline gaming contexts. The 'family' adopts offline gaming contexts not as open to the world but as 'home' and as means for strengthening social ties within the team. The 'interest group' uses offline contexts for influencing central institutions of territorialised cultures as part of their political action. The 'company' constructs offline contexts which are able to connect to the deterritorialised culture of e-sport.

Media practices point to a 'communicative deterritorialisation' of pro-gaming squads and gaming contexts. Offline contexts such as boot camps are largely used for online gaming and translocal communication. Offline contexts facilitate occasional 'offline' meetings but to build local gaming squads remains an exception. E-sport itself mostly manifests itself online. Nevertheless, even for the deterritorialised culture of e-sport, territorial orientation can offer a discursive frame for creating a 'home' and an identity for the team, despite the 'family' uniting members beyond one region and one nation - not excluding members on the basis of territorial belonging. However, reterritorialisation and the rejection of deterritorialisation seem to remain a relevant desire and a means for imagining the team's identity even when gaming cannot be restricted to territory but is still part of the deterritorialised world of e-sports. Thus, territorial belonging is exposed as an unstable cultural construction, as American gamers can represent Sweden on the basis of their belonging to a transnational organisation, which has offices in Sweden. Still, the territorial belonging staged at events is created through aesthetic value. To conclude, the processes of de- and reterritorialisation seem to make territorial belonging negotiable within e-sport.

E-SPORT GAMING: REINFORCING GENDER RELATIONS

Whereas territorial belonging seems to be negotiable, gender seems to structure pro-gaming. Gaming groups and contexts are organised along the gendered belonging of pro-gamers. Teams have male and female squads and leagues offer male and female competitions.

FEMALE AND MALE GAME PLAY

If sport constructs less able bodies for women, the biological argument is often dismissed in the context of e-sport. Game play is not understood as being directly linked to biology but as being dependent on knowledge and attitude. Nevertheless, e-sport constructs for female gamers a game play that is inferior when compared to male game play. The inferiority of female game play is explained by insinuating that female gamers have less gaming experience, knowledge and motivation than males. Even female pro-gamers construct female gamers as less dedicated and motivated:

There was only one female gamer who played at this high level of performance with male gamers, apart from that there are no women who were motivated to train so much and to dedicate

themselves so much to this game in order to get ahead of male gamers. (e-sport pro-gamer, female G)

In addition, professional team play is understood as having two interdependent dimensions, a 'social-orientated' and a 'game-orientated' dimension. The 'social' dimension refers to the emotional relationship between the gamers. It describes their ability to bond or to become friends with each other. We have already seen that the social dimension is strongly connected to sharing a local gaming context. The 'game' dimension refers to the gaming relation between the gamers. It describes how well they play together as a group. Both dimensions are interdependent and expressed through mediated communication. Both are concerned with qualities of communication and both are gendered.

Feminine game play is associated with the social dimension of gaming which reproduces gender stereotypes of women being more caring as opposed to being competitive. Thus, the social relationships among squad members, but also among team members, are understood as being more important to female gamers:

> With females you have to have that bond inside and outside the game, I think it helps tremendously for female gamers if you create a bond outside of the game and come into the game together and you are all working together for one goal. (pro-gamer, female S)

Female gamers are constructed as valuing the social dimension more than the pro-gaming context of the organised competition. This central discourse is produced by websites informing about and discussing e-sport, but is also reproduced in interviews. It manifests itself, for example, in the understanding of how female gamers refuse to accept the official decision of a league and the resulting suspension of a tournament:

> A female gamer was excluded from the competition by the ESL [E-Sport League] because of cheating and all the other teams did object [...] they [the teams] said, "we want to reconsider the exclusion, the finals of our championship are about to start and we demand that the finals are postponed". The ESL said, "no, we won't postpone and reconsider", so they [the teams] said, "OK, then we play the finals without you". So, the female gaming scene is small but there is also a great solidarity. (team manager, male D)

In fact, the four finalists, including the expelled team member, played the play-offs of the Deutsche Female Meisterschaft 2009 (DFM, German Female Major Series) between themselves and without the administrators of the league. Even though, male gamers also joined the protest against the league, the incident was interpreted as an indicator for the sociality of female gamers.

In contrast to female game play, male game play is understood as the ability to work well together without having to be best friends:

> You can get five guys together from any team put them together and they can play, just play the game, they are able to do that, you know, even if they haven't practiced together, they all know what they can do, they all know their role, with women it is a little bit different and I am not sure why [...] but with females

you have to have that bond inside and outside the game. (pro-gamer female S)

Thus, females are constructed as more socially-oriented than game-oriented when compared to male gamers.

The hierarchy between male and female game play becomes particularly apparent in the construction of 'Counter-strike' and 'Counter-strike Women'. 'Counter-strike Women' refers to the game 'Counter-strike' being competitively played by female gamers. The relation between the gendered gaming practices is hierarchical because male game play understood as 'Counter-strike' is rendered into the universal and central gaming practice when compared to 'Counter-strike Women'. A hierarchy of gender practices is, thus, achieved through assigning the universal meaning to male and the particular to female practices. The same logic is applied in sports where terms such as for example 'football', 'soccer' or 'athlete' is used for referring to men and men´s sports but 'women' or 'female' is added when referring to women or women´s sports.

The hierarchy of gender practices can also be grasped when gaming contexts are understood as being less professional because they offer 'Counter-strike Women':

Altogether there are less women who play, so it is easier to achieve a professional level within female gaming and that is the reason why the WCG [World Cyber Games] are more professionally orientated, they offer these games which have really stood the test of time, thus, there is only Counter-strike 1.6, at the ESWC [E-Sport World Cup] there is also Counter-strike Zero and Counter-strike Women which the World Cyber Games exclude. (pro-gamer, female G)

The statement shows that Counter-strike played competitively by female gamers is not only constructed as a different game than Counter-strike, but is also associated with being inferior. As female gamers could theoretically compete within 'Counter-strike', 'Counter-strike Women' is considered unnecessary. To understand a separate space for females as redundant and unnecessary represents a central discourse within e-sport. The discourse is produced within the male dominated user discussions of central e-sport websites, but also reproduced by interview partners:

The community criticises it [female gaming] because everyone is saying that different bodies do not make a difference during gaming, so if they [female gamers] want game, then they should compete against men. (e-sport journalist, male T)

The quote indicates that this discourse is based on the idea that contrary to physical sports there is no need to separate between male and female athletes/gamers[7]. But, as we have seen, e-sport already constructs a system of differentiation which produces gendered gaming experience, skills and motivation. Thus, once female gaming is abolished, it is anticipated that female gamers too will disappear within pro-gaming because they are under-

FEMALE AND MALE GAMING CONTEXTS

E-sport offers a range of gendered gaming contexts for pro-gaming. The imagination, however, that one day pro-gaming could be practiced in mixed leagues still exists:

> I think one day, I think there will be mixed leagues, but not for a very long time there is just, it is just impossible right now. But one day, once female gamers are viewed as just gamers, not female then there can be mixed leagues. (pro-gamer, female S)

The quote makes clear that the relationship between the construction of gamers and gaming contexts is understood as interdependent. In other words, gendered gaming contexts produce gendered gamers and the other way around.

Even though female gaming contexts are constructed as inferior, they can be perceived as safe from gender discriminations:

> When you go online as a female gamer it is just very uncomfortable, you are surrounded by trolls, males that are out to get you, it is not very comfortable, but tournaments like this ESWC [eSport World Cup] allows female gamers to come out and to be comfortable in a tournament and play and really feel what the males have been feeling for years and years. (pro-gamer, female S)

We can see that offline gaming contexts which offer females a separate tournament space are preferred to online gaming contexts.

To play games such as Counter-strike as a gendered girl in a competitive way and within a male dominated culture of gaming could be read as a practice of resistance. By participating in a gaming culture, which is constructed as male, female gamers seem to transgress into male gaming spaces. Viewed from outside of e-sport, this transgression could be understood as a possibility of rejecting dominant constructions of femininity by participating in masculine practices and contexts. However, as we have seen within e-sport, female gamers are constructed as different to male gamers. By emphasising looks over sporting skill and expertise, the position of 'emphasised femininity' (Connell, 2003) is constructed for female gamers. As a result, female gamers are constructed like female athletes as overly feminine and heterosexual. But female gamers can also identify with meanings of femininity, which are less compliant with the gender hierarchy. The female professional gamer S. contrasts various meanings of femininity within pro-gaming as following:

> You have your group of pretty girls with nice earrings, their hair is perfect and make up and they are here to look pretty and play and you have the girls that are here, they are screaming and they don't care what they look like and they are just like, yeah let's win. (pro-gamer, female S)

Even though female gamers are confronted with meanings of femininity which are based on emphasising looks over gaming skills, female gamers can expand these boundaries and identify with attitudes and practices which are at the margin of what appears to be femininity.

Still, within e-sport, female gamers are linked and associated with commercialised

and de-professionalised gaming contexts and practices which further their deprived status within the established gender hierarchy. The process of commercialisation, hence, contributes to reinforcing gender hierarchies.

So called 'show matches' embody the heterosexual and 'emphasised femininity' which according to Connell (2003, p.183-188) is not only complicit in sustaining hegemonic masculinity, but is also *performed* for men. 'Show matches' are competitions which are staged at the exhibition stands of hardware and software companies:

> Here [World Cyber Games 2008] there is also an exhibition stand of for example Thermaltake [hardware manufacturer], they have their own female squad here and then they invite another female squad for playing show matches, where, put simply, women play against each other in order to attract visitors and that is usually easier done using women than using men. (pro-gamer, female G)

The statement makes clear that so-called show matches are not understood as part of the official tournaments but as part of the marketing strategy of team sponsors. The purpose of show matches is attracting attention and potential male customers to an exhibition stand of a sponsor during an event. Unlike official tournaments, these gaming contexts are not based on prior qualifications and do not lead to qualification for other competitions or titles. They are outside of the professionalised league systems. Show matches demonstrate how heterosexual[8] emphasised femininity and the commodification of women's bodies are interwoven. As a result, discourses within e-sport dismiss female gamers as 'marketing dolls'. Such a construction of female gamers further undermines the status of female gaming:

> You see them [female gamers] as marketing dolls, even if this sounds derogative, but that is how the community sees them as well and why the community does not take them seriously. (e-sport journalist male T)

Female gamers are often absent as athletes within e-sport competitions, which are officially gender-neutral but implicitly male gaming contexts. Instead, and as a result of the process of commercialisation, they are used as marketing tools in gaming contexts such as show matches and promotion tours. Their role as athletes is, hence, threatened by these commercialised and de-professionalised gaming contexts. Moreover, their role as athletes is confined to explicitly feminine and female-only contexts, which are constructed as the gaming context for the less-able gamer.

Another practice of 'othering' is the 'implantation' of female squads within male dominated league systems. As it is possible to change members after a squad has qualified for the E-sport Professional League (EPS), gamers can take part within this league without prior qualification. The company team Snogard Dragons took advantage of this structure and exchanged their male gamers after their qualification for female gamers in order to generate attention within e-sport. The company team provided the only female squad within the history of the EPS. This 'implantation' of female gamers for marketing purposes received intense online discussions. The idea that female gamers are offered gaming opportunities because they are more marketable than males is a central discourse within e-sport which also helps to trivialise the performance of female gamers.

To choose the members of a gaming squad primarily in order to generate media attention and not in order to win the competition also shows how commercialisation already

subverts the win-loss principle of the sport ideology. Commercialisation could thus be understood as reinforcing gender as a structuring practice. In other words, sponsors and teams primarily understand female gamers as a marketing instrument:

> It [female gaming] is a big issue for our partners and sponsors, Intel sponsored our female squad last year and sent them to Egypt; gaming events were held there and five blond girls came from Germany and kicked ass in a computer game, so we actually used this for publicity. (team manager, male D)

This bias is accepted even by female gamers because sponsors are the only organisations which support e-sport financially and therefore their activities are legitimised:

> Even though some girls are here just for marketing purposes only and they may not have that much skill, it is still a win-win for gamers because even though some guys can see it and be jealous and say why did they get to go if they are not that good, it is still a win-win because sponsors are still putting money out into the gaming world." (pro-gamer, female S)

To summarise, gender is adopted as a *structuring* practice concerning pro-gaming within e-sport. Gamers are constructed and understood through gendered gaming practices and contexts, which together form a gendered hierarchy. Within this hierarchy female gamers are associated with inferior game play and de-professionalised gaming contexts that are reduced to marketing purposes.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown how e-sport negotiates gender and territoriality by examining contexts, meanings and practices of pro-gaming. Even though gaming contexts are extended into offline contexts, they are not necessarily *structured* by territorial belonging. Their reality remains a "cosmopolitan reality" (Beck, 2002), which is sustained through local and translocal communication. Territorial belonging within e-sport is transformed into a *flexible* practice. Thus, it has lost its structuring properties and becomes negotiable. As we've seen, it also becomes an aesthetic practice for constructing tournament spaces.

E-sport represents an emerging social form, which is 'cosmopolitan' in the sense that it is open to the world. As a result, gamers are not only able to participate but also to represent a country or a team independent from their territorial belongings. The only boundary seems to be mediated communication because as long as it is possible to game and to communicate, it seems possible to participate. E-sport therefore represents a 'social world' in the sense of Shibutani (1955, p. 566) because "boundaries […] are set neither by territory nor by formal group membership but by the limits of effective communication". We can emphasise that e-sport is limited primarily by *mediated* communication.

But even within the deterritorialised world of e-sport, territorial belonging still remains an imagination, a desire and a discursive frame for some teams. Processes of reterritorialisation and a desired nationalisation of e-sport namely the integration into national culture through the recognition of central institutions of society (e.g. national government, national media) are also part of political activities. In addition, territorial belonging can be negotiated differently compared to other social worlds. In contrast to sport, the territorial belonging of the e-sport athletes are understood as less important when compared to the adopted belonging of the organisation they represent. Finally, social forms within e-sport

can reject the 'cosmopolitan reality' of e-sport and imagine themselves through territorial belonging.

New social forms like e-sport are able to transgress cultural boundaries, to exist across society´s institutions and to build independent systems of meaning. As a result, they are often argued to have the potential to overcome certain social classifications such as gender. But contrary to these theories, we have seen that gender remains relevant to e-sport. Whereas the relevance of territorial belonging can be negotiated for pro-gaming contexts, practices and groups, the same cannot be said for gender. Despite the potential that follows from the reduced significance of physical differences in e-sport, e-sport reproduces dominant gender discourses. Game play of females is understood as different and less professional than that of males. Whilst in traditional sports, physical differences are used for differentiating men from women, in e-sport communicative differences (concerning self-discipline, competitive spirit and sociality within gaming) structure gender differences.

The gendering of gaming also becomes apparent in commercialised and de-professionalised gaming contexts, which disconnect female gamers from pro-gaming. Female and male pro-gamers are constructed differently. Female gamers are either hidden within e-sport (in online spaces which are male dominated) or made hyper-visible (in de-professionalised or explicit female gaming spaces). The commercialised hyper-visibility of female gamers can be understood as a variation of 'emphasised femininity' (Connell, 2003) because it is complicit in constructing a gender hierarchy.

Female gamers also reproduce the hierarchy of gendered gaming. From the perspective of female gamers, female-only gaming groups and contexts then become a double-edged sword. They can be perceived as safe gaming environments compared to male dominated online gaming contexts. But they also can be experienced as the only option to participate in e-sport as a female and as an option that is less socially valued than other gaming contexts.

By looking at gender we are also made aware that apart from teams, events and central websites sponsors also have symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989) within e-sport. For example, within e-sport it is accepted that sponsors who represent business companies have a bias towards female gamers. The acceptance of de-professionalised and commercialised gaming spaces as a 'win-win' situation demonstrates how symbolic power is interwoven with commercialisation. Sponsors within e-sport receive the political power of institutions, namely the power "to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible and explicit social divisions" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.23). Bourdieu (1989, p. 23) refers to such a power as "political power par excellence". Hence, organised competitive gaming does not take place in a social-political vacuum. It is situated within a social world which is based on existing interdependencies and power relations.

Thus, if we want to understand the gendering of gaming and how gaming produces social divisions, it is productive to look beyond the game. Gaming cannot be fully understood by looking at games in isolation. Hence, more research examining how games are practiced and contextualised within social and cultural situations is needed.

To conclude, the way media are used, contextualised and understood within e-sport construct a new media practice: pro-gaming. This media practice renegotiates local, national and transnational orientations, but is structured by traditional gender relations. Pro-gaming then seems to represent a 'cosmopolitan sport' par excellence. Especially when considering that the term "cosmopolitan" has been gendered as "man of the world" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 187). Hence, gaming and especially pro-gaming deserve our critical attention because these media practices are central to emerging social worlds where new media discourses and

practices are produced and existing social hierarchies are contested as well as reproduced.

<div align="center">ENDNOTES</div>

1 For example the United Kingdom Clan League (UKCL) founded in 1996, the Deutsche Clanliga (DeCL) founded in 1997 and modelled on the UKCL, and the ClanBase founded in 1998 and the only one of the three, which is still active in 2011.

2 LAN-parties (Local Area Network) and LAN-events are organised gatherings where gamers meet offline not necessarily to compete but to game together and to socialise. LAN-events are bigger in size and more commercialised than LAN-parties. By contrary, private LANs are meetings within a group of friends which are not public and usually take place at the private home of the gamers.

3 Gaming contexts are not pre-defined by the researcher. The term is used as an open concept for examining sets of practices and roles which can also be recognised by a third party as a context.

4 All quotes from interviews are translated from German. The only exception are the quotes from "pro-gamer female S", those quotes are originally in English.

5 The term 'boot camp' refers within e-sport to offline meetings of gaming squads for training purposes. Usually, a boot camp lasts for a couple of days and gamers meet offline to train online. 'Leisure gaming' refers to gaming where having fun and gaming together is more important than preparing for a competition.

6 This refers to the discourse that there is a relationship between playing violent games and physical violence. In Germany this is an important discourse concerning video gaming. It also played a role in how the two school shootings which occurred in Germany were discussed.

7 This discourse is likely to change once games based on motion control systems are introduced into e-sport. Games based on motion control systems (e.g. Wii) could as soon as they are used within e-sport, re-create the need for gendered leagues and re-introduce discourses about the body, which are similar to the ones concerning physical sports.

8 The term 'heterosexual' is used here because female gamers understood as being attractive to male customers and as able to attract males to the exhibition stand.

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DID WE IGNORE THE SOCIAL COMMENTARY? RESPONDING TO BORAT ON YouTube

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Abstract: Ever since the fictitious Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev became an icon of contemporary popular culture, many questions have arisen about the reception of Borat by the general public. Namely, how have common people created a shared representation of Borat? And how is this complicated character and comedic manner undertaken by Sacha Baron Cohen being deciphered? These questions are crucial for understanding the challenges and constraints of social satire that exploits ethnically and stylistically sophisticated identity.   To address these questions, which surely could be asked about other international media products as well, this article deals with the reception of Borat the character on YouTube. In particular, the viewers' reaction to the YouTube video titled "The Best of Borat" is analysed. This video has been viewed more than seven million times and commented on more than seven thousand times. The conceptual framework of this analysis is derived from the theory of social representations postulated by Serge Moscovici. In line with this theory two main dimensions – anchoring and objectification – are explored in order to understand how shared or divergent knowledge of Borat is created. Thus the basic socio-cognitive processes behind Borat are revealed. The results suggest that anchoring of Borat is embedded in national identification discourse, whereas objectification differentiates people according to their sense of humour. Likewise, some implications of Borat's reception for participatory culture and civic engagement are outlined.

Keywords: mockumentary, satiric discourse, social representation theory, YouTube comments

Ten years ago the world first met fictitious Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev, who appeared in *Da Ali G Show* on Channel 4 in the UK. Exploiting the stylistic merits of mockumentary (ambiguity of characters and situations, improvisation, etc.), Borat, a character created and portrayed by British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, attempted to unmask the discreet charm of the British and American middle-class lifestyle and worldview (hypocrisy, ignorance, righteousness). It took a couple of years to turn Borat from a largely indigenous phenomen-

on into an internationally recognised postmodern symbol. A milestone on the way to worldwide popularity was the release in 2006 of the movie *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Along with TV shows such as *The Office* or the cartoon series *South Park*, Borat the character has noticeably contributed to social commentary on the late-liberal political and public culture of Western societies (Boyer and Yurchak, 2010).

The central motive that underlies Borat's skits is a grotesque perception of non-Westerners by Westerners and vice versa[1]. Though conventional, such an approach has constantly evoked a public buzz. Since 2005, when Borat was invited to host the MTV Europe Music Awards, many controversies have arisen concerning the manner in which the Borat character is portrayed and how Borat represents different social groups. Some countries, such as Kazakhstan and Russia, even banned showing the movie. Likewise, it is speculated that the popularity of Borat has tremendously increased the number of British tourists visiting Kazakhstan (Saunders, 2010, pp. 119–20). A number of lawsuits have been initiated, and some have already been settled, against the creators of Borat by those ridiculed in the movie. In spite of all these disagreements, which also might be viewed as a part of Baron Cohen's marketing strategy, the movie was a commercial success and was nominated for the 2006 Academy Awards and 2007 Golden Globes.

Up to now, scholars have focused on Borat's role in branding a nation (Stock, 2009; Saunders, 2010), challenging movie genres (Torchin, 2008), reproducing folkloric patterns (Kononenko and Kuharenko, 2008), provoking national self-criticism and criticism on identity politics (Lee, 2008; Lalo, 2009), and even in drama teaching (Aitken, 2009). Moreover, special issues of academic journals and books have been dedicated to the Borat phenomenon. Apart from these researchers, ordinary consumers of popular culture have been discussing Borat as well. Yet surprisingly little scholarly attention has been focused on the public reception of Borat and how it has changed over time. This topic has remained somewhere in the background, although it explains a crucial part of the public discourse. To foreground it, this article addresses the reception issue by analysing internet comments about Borat on the video-sharing website *YouTube*, which has become a place where many famous videos are discursively elaborated. Michael Hoechsmann and Giuliana Cucinelli (2007, p. 95) have claimed that by posting scenes from *Borat* the film on *YouTube* Borat the character has been exposed to viral communication. In other words, Borat's popularity has to some extent been influenced by Web 2.0 social networking and the user-driven content generation. Thus, *YouTube* comments as an outcome of viral communication provide us with ample information on how consensual or divergent knowledge of internationally mediated objects is created.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SATIRICAL DISCOURSE

I define *YouTube* comments as a particular discursive field; they eventually take part in the creation of social representations and are influenced by already existing social representations. The conceptual architecture of this article is derived from social representation theory (SRT), which provides various heuristic tools for capturing the dialogicity of shared knowledge. SRT insists that our collective behaviour and identity are constrained by social representations: a system of shared values, ideas and practices inscribed within the framework of pre-existing thought. Social representations evolve around conceptual themata (source ideas, image concepts) which express essential and generic properties to classes of objects in the world and which are determinations and dispositions of intentions. Particular collectivity accepts themata as plausible and "in the course of history, [they] become problematised; for one reason or another they become the focus of attention, and a source of ten-

sion and conflict" (Marková, 2000, p. 446). Conceptual themata reveal themselves through various pragmatic manifestations or methodological themes.

Social representations to some extent resemble scientific theories: both attempt to explain an unknown or unfamiliar phenomenon or certain aspects of this phenomenon that is important to a social group. Scientists create a reified universe, however, by using rigid methodologies and systematic data analysis, whereas common people converse on a daily basis about unfamiliar social objects (politics, illness, movie stars) which "startles us out of a passive state" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 235), thereby creating a consensual universe where the social representations of these objects can thrive. Serge Moscovici, the founder of SRT, (2000, p. 34) has argued that

> In a *consensual universe* society is seen as a group of individuals who are equal and free, each entitled to speak in the name of the group and under its aegis. Thus, no one member is assumed to possess an exclusive competence, but each can acquire any competence which may be required.

A consensual universe most likely emerges within a de-traditionalised and liberal public sphere, which, according to Habermas (1962/1989), originated from journals, coffeehouses, and reading clubs in 18th century Europe. A freely accessible and dialogical public sphere that tolerates differences is a crucial prerequisite for generating a consensual universe and, hence, competing social representations. (For a more thorough analysis of this argument, see Jovchelovitch, 2001, pp. 165–175.)

The very logic of a consensual universe presumes that social representations are constructed within discourse. The discursive elaboration of social objects separates what Wagner (1998, p. 307) calls *the world of something* from *the world of domesticated objects*. In this context, humour, surely, is a peculiar mode of such demarcating discourse, which either affirms or transforms social representations. Humour has evidently a huge manipulative potential, as it is highly demanded by mass-media users. For a long time psychological theories have occupied scholarship on humour, downplaying the understanding of humour as a social fact. Only after the 1970s can one speak of a serious emergence of a sociological interest in humour (Kuipers, 2008, p. 361). The discussion of theories that have dealt with humour as a social phenomenon lies outside the purview of this paper. Here I just want to outline how ambivalence that is inherent to socially sensitive satirical discourse may influence the formation of social representations.

On the one hand, especially in terms of political and ethnic humour, we can interpret joking as subversive communication. For example, it may deconstruct established power relations in society by supporting alternative (sometimes also humiliating) representations of the collective identities of dominant groups. On the other hand, humour may reproduce social order, maintaining the established representations of dominant groups; thus, satirical discourse manifests its conservative nature. Another dimension of this ambivalence is recapitulated by Kuipers, who insists that "joking apparently manages, more than most other forms of communication, to combine the seemingly contradictory functions of hierarchy-building and bringing about solidarity" (2008, p. 366). Therefore one may argue that socially sensitive humour may implicitly divide its recipients into different interpretive communities. For instance, one group may favour humour that heals while another prefers satire that wounds as in the case of Horatian and Juvenalian humour (Holbert et al, 2011). In such conditions the existing social representations of collective identity ultimately play an important role by giving reasons to identify with one or another interpretive community. Hence, on

the social level, as Marjolein t'Hart (2007, p. 20) admits, a joke, certainly "can bring people together but it can also shock, hurt, and exclude. Humour can bind but also divide".

Within satirical communication as well as in other discourses, two simultaneous processes take part in the formation of social representations: anchoring and objectification. Anchoring means to identify and assimilate an unfamiliar object on the basis of prior knowledge and experience; this process is based on ready-made opinions that express themselves in one of two ways: by generalising or by particularising. Objectification, in turn, helps to materialise abstractions and uncertain things. In relation to the core of social representations or themata, Liu (2004, p. 257) has argued that anchoring, as an inner-directed process, integrates new and unfamiliar phenomena into existing knowledge and enriches the meanings of a thema, while objectification, as an outer-directed process, turns abstract notions of a thema into reality and gives a thema its concrete form by means of pragmatic manifestations.

Regarding the social representation of Borat, we may interpret anchoring as the invoking of different stereotypes and social identities (national, sexual, gender, class etc.) within various audiences. Presumably, viewers already have some of these social categories (anchors) in mind when they are entertained by Baron Cohen. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand the mockery or insult of Kazakh journalist. In other words, ethnic and political humour in general and Boratian humour in particular spring up from existing social representations of collective identities. This idea is in accordance with t'Hart's argument of humour as a political resource (2007, p. 17): "One condition must be met before humour can be utilised in social protest: the condition of a pre-existing collective identity, or a strict setting of the jokes". On the other hand, objectification comes into play when the audience attempts to define Borat as a generic phenomenon. As a genre, a mocumentary is too weird or unfamiliar to be immediately comprehended, especially when one deals with variations of humour cultures across societies, e.g. different senses of humour and joking habits. To avoid uncertainty, the audience attempts to construct a shared image of this ambiguous comedic manner. By agreeing upon a common image, Borat becomes cognitively more controllable.

Endless communication on social objects within a group not merely creates but also transforms social representations. The nature of social representations, thus, is dialogical, and dialogicity occurs within representations as well as among different representations of the same object. Social representation is not a quiet thing, as Caroline Howarth (2006, pp. 65–86) recognises, and there is constantly a fight for meaning of reality among hegemonic and oppositional representations in the public sphere. Accordingly, an alternative representation, which is invoked by satire about particular collective identity, may enable the counter-discourse of a ridiculed group.

YouTube AS A CONSENSUAL UNIVERSE

Drawing a parallel with the 18th-century public sphere, *YouTube* may be read as a 21st-century multi-storeyed coffee-house wherein a heterogeneous public converse on different topics and the coffeehouse owners do not usually constrain these conversations unless they violate basic rules of conduct (see *YouTube* community guidelines). *YouTube* is no longer just a tool for communication: it exists as a cultural system in its own right, encompassing different subcultures. As Burgess and Green (2009, p. 57) have convincingly demonstrated, "All contributors of content to *YouTube* are potential participants in a common space; one that supports a diverse range of uses and motivations, but that has a coherent cultural logic". *YouTube* provides an opportunity to discuss hot issues or to challenge

propaganda, as well as to promote cross-cultural learning (cf. Lindgren, 2011; Bloom and Johnston, 2010; Christensen, 2008). The collaborative babble of *YouTube*, indeed, vividly illustrates how social representations are formed within a consensual universe as proposed by SRT.

Of course, the anonymity of the *YouTube* community does complicate the idea of a consensual world, since no one knows a particular YouTuber's identity or who is behind them. Nevertheless, a number of social categories may already be assigned to YouTubers. For instance, in his recently published book Michael Strangelove (2010, pp. 103–136) outlines various identities of YouTubers emerging from their online practices: videographers, celebrities, fans, haters, spammers, and various deviants. Even though defined from outside, these identities illuminate the social order on *YouTube* that parallels the one outside social networking websites. However, the division of two social realities is analytical rather than empirical; participation in the *YouTube* community is at times motivated by the necessity to safeguard traditional collective identities (religious, national).

A satirical discourse on the Internet, and particularly on *YouTube*, is an important constitutive force for establishing a consensual universe. Doubtlessly, comedy is among the most popular content themes for *YouTube* (Strangelove, 2010, p. 125; Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 53). Moreover, many YouTubers respond to these videos by posting comments that not necessarily mean engaging in a thoughtful dialog. Viewed from a more abstract level, popular culture is part and parcel of a new media paradigm that revolves around participatory culture and collective intelligence, concepts in accordance with the Moscovician definition of a consensual world introduced in the early 1960s. Jenkins (2006, p. 244) has argued that this paradigm stems from changes in media consumption, which has shifted "from individualised and personalised media consumption towards consumption as a networked practice". Evidently, the Internet is one of the major factors that have generated new participatory skills, which might be more inclusive than forms of participation demanding original content creation.

New online participatory skills are specifically being applied to popular culture, for which Jenkins (2006, p. 246) provides two reasons: (a) awareness that the stakes are low and (b) that playing with popular culture is a lot more fun than dealing with more serious matters. Moreover, popular culture has also found appealing ways of mediating politics that have facilitated civic engagement of otherwise apathetic citizens. Apart from empty entertainment there are good expressions of politics in popular culture that, as Liesbet van Zoonen (2005) claim, may raise political awareness and can be a relevant resource for political citizenship by making it more pleasurable, engaging, and inclusive. The consumption of popular culture that deals with political or politicised topics is a somewhat unintentional way of engaging in politics. Thus *YouTube* both as a coffeehouse and as the storehouse of popular culture is a place where "the online performance of political and religious selves can become particular acts and practices of (unlocated) citizenship" (Van Zoonen et al, 2010, p. 260). In line with this perspective, we may ask how the products of popular culture that are made global via *YouTube* influence political citizenship across different societies.

METHODOLOGY

By applying SRT to the topic of this article, I shall attempt to demonstrate how social representations of Borat have been constructed by comments on *YouTube*, and how they have changed over time. As Borat is "a chimera of Islamo-Arabic foreignness with a colorful Soviet gloss" (Saunders, 2010, p. 72) who is complemented by Judeophobia and misogyny, one might predict a multilevel anchoring of the character. Simultaneously, as highlighted

earlier, the uncertain comedic manner undertaken by Baron Cohen generates the necessity for objectification by assigning a more definite image to this style.

This article is based on qualitative analysis of Internet comments posted on the most viewed Borat video entitled "The Best of Borat" (with more than seven million hits). This 24-minute video clip consists of several well-known episodes from the first year of Borat's appearance on Channel 4. The video was uploaded in 2006, and, as of the date when this paper was written, had received more than seven thousand comments. The qualitative data set was obtained from the comments posted during the period from 2006 to 2009. Although sometimes it was possible to infer the national identity of commentators, their real identity (national, gender, age) remains unknown[2]. Therefore written discourse was the only plausible unit of analysis. Remarkably though, some *YouTube* commentators might be associated with institutionalised roles, such as haters and spammers. Moreover, within that four-year period it is possible to pinpoint active commentators (such as Bluebird1787, Cortezawwris, Folkmusic1991), some of whom are also active members of other online communities.

My qualitative analytical procedures are derived from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I have used purposeful sampling strategy whereby only information rich *YouTube* comments that reflect the perception of Borat were selected. The first step in data collection was the demarcation of the unit of coding by selecting pertinent comments by identifying those that contained detailed opinion. Hence, numerous comments which appeared as spontaneous reactions to the video, consisting of only a few words (such as "cool video" or "that sucks"), were excluded from the coding. The next step was open coding: comments were thematically analysed, and salient basic themes were identified in each comment usually fixing them as in vivo codes. During this analytical phase, paragraph-by-paragraph coding was used: each paragraph of a single comment was assigned one or more labels that marked the presence of a particular theme ('mocking Muslims', 'explanation of the skit'). Where posted comments were part of an explicit conversation, coded themes were also registered as discussion topics. As to open coding, word frequency analysis was used as an additional technique to identify basic themes.

Open coding was followed by further sorting and selection of basic themes until common patterns or organising themes were identified. The acquired organising themes and their mutual relations are illustrated in figure 1 which will be contextualised in the subsequent analysis. Insofar as was reasonable, the organising themes were broken up to create subthemes. A total of 427 references were coded and 46 thematic items were obtained. These items stand for two broad, but interrelated *global themes*: national identification and assessment of humour (for more on thematic analysis, see Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998). These global themes, as I shall demonstrate, operate on different levels of Borat's social representation. To manage all these analytical operations consistently and effectively, qualitative research software *Nvivo 8* was used. By offering systematic data collection and analysis, *Nvivo* embraces many analytical procedures of grounded theory (open coding, node creation, memo writing, etc.).

ANCHORING BORAT: THE FIGHT FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

Whenever a particular national attachment of an individual or social group is emphasised, national identity comes into play. The mediated identity qualities that are possessed by characters of popular culture most likely become anchors for an audience. The situation turns out to be more complicated when the character's identity fluctuates in meaning, as it does in the case of Borat. The national identification process is a major global theme, which organises the anchoring of Borat on *YouTube*. That is to say, commentators
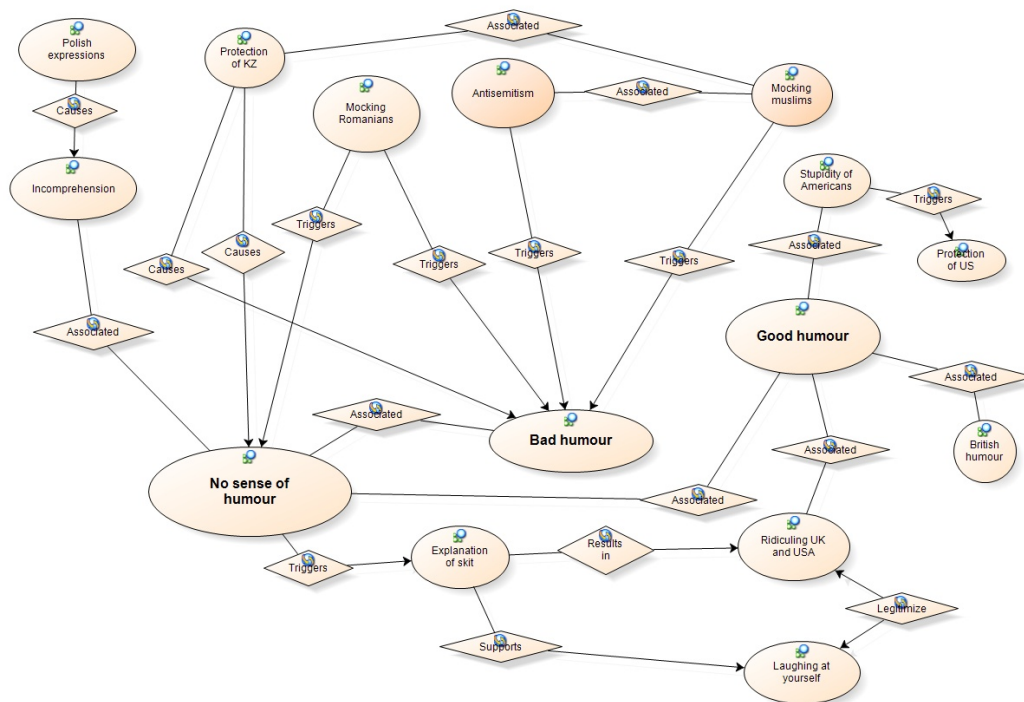
Figure 1: *Thematic network of YouTube comments about Borat*

either try to define the national parameters of Borat's identity, or they highlight particular identities within Baron Cohen's ethnic humour that somehow defines Borat.

In 2006 and 2007, Kazakh and American identities were the most relevant categories among *YouTube* comments, which is not surprising since Borat represents Kazakhstan and he basically mocks Americans. The representation of Kazakhstan as created by Borat is rarely accepted, and only a few commentators assume an insulting tone towards Kazakhs. Overall, a dominant motive is protection of Kazakh identity, whereby the posted video and also the movie are interpreted as offensive to Kazakhstan. Such protection attempts to refute the false image of Kazakhstan created by Borat. Contrary to this image, religious and ethnic tolerance and inclination to modernisation are stressed by commentators as an essential part of contemporary Kazakh society:

> I am born in kazakhstan... this is not funny, what borat makes... kazakstan is a tolerant, modern country. (georgHAN)[3]

> Borate shut up! Kazakhstan is very beautiful and the people there are not so! If you do not believe, come to Kazakhstan!!! (bmskz777)

> I'm from kazakhstan, and everything in this film not true. it`s fairy about our country. we have internet, TV, everything that have all world! (Rahhhis)

Equally, they insist that Baron Cohen produces a misperception of a typical Kazakh who looks Asian, not Arabian, although simultaneously the ethnic diversity of Kazakhstani people is emphasised:

> Why the hell does Borat look arabic? Real Kazakh people look asian! Do you fucking ignorants know where Kazakhstan is? Where was the Soviet Union? Not in the middle east! Check it out! This is sooo lame. (couek)

Noticeably, the advocating comments are also written by non-Kazakhs who base their positions on personal experience. Along with the common protective ethos, non-Kazakh comments express remorse that Baron Cohen has humiliated Kazakhstanis. Apart from blaming Baron Cohen exclusively, a number of commentators admit that such misrepresentation of Kazakhstan stems from the ignorance of other people (other commentators) who are naïve and gullible to believe that Borat talks about an actual country. While the word-frequency analysis shows a decrease in the linguistic markers of Kazakh identity in the 2009 comments (see chart 1)[4], protection remained a major theme when Kazakhstan was mentioned. Kazakh identity, however, is not as salient in comments made in 2009 as it was in 2006 or 2007 . Arguably, that is related to a wider international context. The media were attracted by Kazakhstan's public conflict with Baron Cohen in 2006, but they gradually fell silent in succeeding years. Saunders (2010, p. 126) insists that by the end of 2006 Kazakhstan brand managers had reshaped their strategy towards Borat, attempting to seize the opportunity to tell a positive story about Kazakhstan.

American identity comes to the fore through comments that reflect upon the ignorance of Americans. Using ignorance as an analytical category, I also capture comments stressing the stupidity and poor education of Americans. As a matter of fact, such comments frame Americans as people who are simply not able to see and understand cultures outside their own, therefore permitting Borat to say whatever he wants about Kazakhstan. US foreign policy is also a distinct object of criticism, spotlighting amorality and arrogance as characteristic features of Americans. Occasionally this negative image is contrasted with the positive features of Europeans, which is in line with Saunders' argument that many Europeans wallowed in *Borat* the movie because it confirmed their deepest prejudices towards Americans (2010, p. 149).

Unlike *Borat* the movie, remarkably the posted *YouTube* video ridicules the middle-class habits of British not Americans; nevertheless, the British are insulted in only a few instances. Because Baron Cohen is associated with their highly regarded sense of humour, the British are generally portrayed positively. Apparently, the movie, which came out simultaneously with the *YouTube* video, elicited the so-called halo effect: regardless of whom Borat mocks, they will largely be generalised as Americans. Thus, Americans is sometimes used as a metaphor for the ignorance and hypocrisy of big nations:

> What uneducated American you are i m sorry Kazakhstan is Asian steppe country. With distinct looking people that don't look European. I know you don't have a map in American maybe could buy one from another country. (cortezawwris)

> Wow ur the fucking stereotype of an American, always thinking you're better than everyone just becuase you drop bombs on third world countries and kill thousands of "terrorist" children. And you probably don't know where your own country is situated on a map, so how can you tell that other countries suck? In Europe, people have better salary than in the US, and we have very developed military forces, if you want to have to deal with 25 countries. (yomama629)

The criticism of Americans triggers an opposite reaction as well: a desire to protect American virtues. However, defending comments most likely revolve around the same stereotypes, which are the impetus for criticism by anti-American commentators. Namely, the defenders put an emphasis on the mightiness and historical role of the USA in the progress of humankind. The salience of American identity decreases over the course of time. Furthermore, one may notice 2009 comments are less critical and more pro-American in 2009 (the same year President Barack Obama took office).

If Kazakh and American identities are inevitable, then other national identities elicited by the commentators are by-products of Borat's hybrid image. Romanian and Polish identities are two visible examples of such side-effects: the scene set in Kuzcek, a shabby-looking Kazakh village where Borat lives[5], was actually shot in Romania, and Borat constantly uses Polish expressions as if they were from the Kazakh language. Many commentators have written just to verify that "It is Romania not Kazakhstan" or "He is actually speaking in Polish". Quite a few comments contain negative responses, however.

A number of *YouTube* commentators claim that Borat has humiliated Romanians by misrepresenting their country as deprived and underdeveloped. Likewise, they point to the arrogant and unjust attitude towards the inhabitants of the Romanian village of Glod, which Baron Cohen has exploited in his skits:

> Borat is a fake shit, karderr [commentator's name]. You know what he is doing is not legal? The romanian people in this film (witch is made in Romania not in Kazakstan) were paid for this movie. They knew that he is making a documentari movie about there culture but he made this shit (not legal) he is disrespecting my culture and my tradition. Kaderr you know Romaina is a latin origin country? That village is a gipsy village. [..] ROMANIA IS NOT POOR!!! (negrutzyu)

Since the village population is mainly Roma, their identity is also unintentionally evoked through comments that reveal traditional stereotypes about them (poor, illiterate,
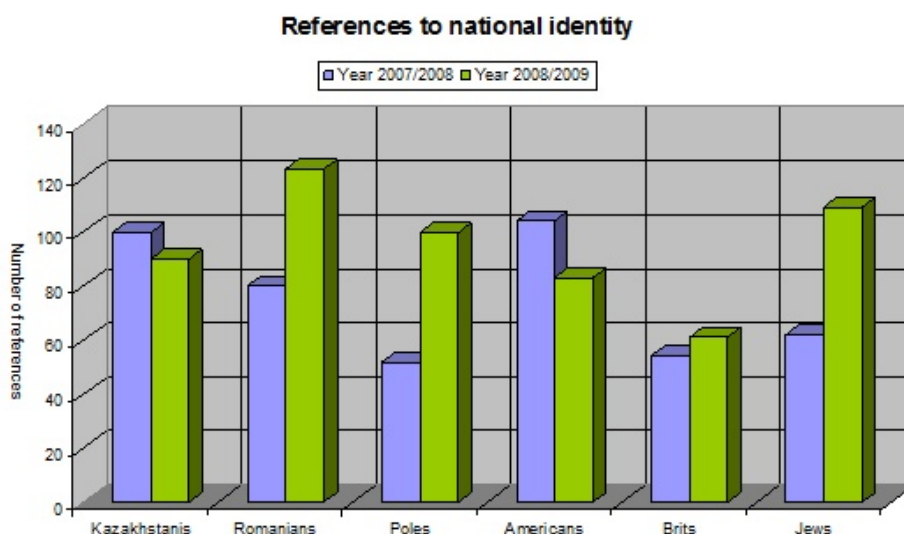

Chart 1

thieving). In addition, discussions about Romanian identity attract commentators who, in fact, approve of the negative image of Romania portrayed by Borat. On the other hand, some *YouTube* commentators want to learn more about Romanians and Kazakhs; in some respect that echoes the idea of cultural learning underlying Baron Cohen's parodies.

Unlike comments stemming from the depiction of a Romanian village, the usage of Polish expressions by Borat is perceived with deep incomprehension: the commentators (many of whom claim to be Poles) cannot understand why Borat speaks Polish if he is supposed to be Kazakh. Several comments indicate a rather negative context for such questioning, suggesting that Baron Cohen is making fun of Poles:

> And at the beginning of his sentences he says "jehnhkoojeh" <- i don't know how to write it in english :) , it's polish word, (dziękuję) and it means "thank you", then at the end of the sentence he says "yag sheh mash", which is also polish sentence (jak się masz?) and it means "how are you?" iT'S STUPID! (Majesior)

Moreover, these comments are at times challenged by commentators who incorrectly believe that the Polish phrases jak się masz (How are you?) and dziękuję (Thanks), which Borat uses so frequently, are actually Czech expressions. Thus, ironically, those who cannot understand Borat's connection with Polish identity are provoked to protect Borat's Polishness by insisting that Borat speaks in Polish not Czech.

Comparing Romanian and Polish related comments, we may notice different national self-images: whereas the comments about Romanians tried to weaken the association between Romania and Borat, the comments about Poles refused/were unable to understand any linkage between Poland and Borat. Conversely, comments about Polish expressions were more frequent and salient, although Borat had exploited some Hebrew and Russian utterances as well. A couple of commentators, in turn, sought to generalise the Romanian case by saying that Borat either mocked or represented Eastern Europeans in general. Nonetheless, Eastern European and post-Soviet identity are somewhat silent issues among *YouTube* comments.

Another by-product of the comments concerns Jewish identity and largely relates to Baron Cohen's Jewish ethnicity. His Jewish origin is a major reason for anti-Semitic utterances suggesting Borat is another manifestation of the Jewish conspiracy:

> Clever trick by the Jews to shame Islam (Borat is none other than "Sacha Baron Cohen" - a zionist jew doing nicely for zionist isreal/hollywood. Let's not get fooled. The Kazah Jew's have been smashing down all other's religions for centuries, now…Islam - shaming with over-done sexism, hyperdirty talk (part of a dumming down, too, like Sarah Silvermann, etc, etc, etc). Look for the pattern - Isreal's using USA again Islam today. (c1amzy)

Suggestions of anti-Semitism became even more salient in comments made during 2009 (chart 1), possibly related to the release of the next Baron Cohen movie Bruno. It was negatively received by Austrians since the hero Bruno represented Austrians' Gay TV[6]. The increase of anti-Semitism might also be elucidated as a gradually formed reaction to the anti-Muslim content of Borat hoax, which has reached its critical mass just recently, because initially there was not a discursive space allocated to this topic in *YouTube* comments. Incidentally, anti-Semitism is characteristic of *YouTube* comments generally, and the term Jew most likely can be seen in negatively rated or unaccepted comments (see Siersdorfer et al,

2010, p. 893). Apart from these explanations, Borat's anti-Semitism might also be perceived as a model for how to do business on post-identity humour. As Steven Lee (2008, p. 24) puts it, "From a financial perspective, the brilliance of Borat is its ability to amuse multiple audiences – from those who understand Baron Cohen's anti-Semitism; to those who… sympathize with Borat's fear of Jews".

On the whole, the comments suggest that over time the Romanian, Jewish, and partly Polish identities have replaced American and Kazakh identities as the two most important anchors of Borat's social representation[7]. Anchoring has chiefly been realised through national identification, leaving aside some other potential identities aroused by Borat's misogyny and homophobia. Instead of multilevel anchoring, which might be enabled by different social identities (gays, feminists, etc.), analysed discourse is dominated by nationality issues. This suggests "*YouTube* is a potential site of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship – a space in which individuals can represent their identities and perspectives, engage with the self-representation of others, and encounter cultural differences" (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 81). Due to Borat's hybrid character, many commentators find a reason either to identify certain groups with Borat or to disassociate these groups from him and preserve the uniqueness of one's national identity (Kazakhs, Romanians, and Americans). Thus, anchoring has been carried out as particularisation. Occasionally, as in the case of the Americans (the very object of Borat's mockery), they have become a generalised anchor symbolising Western societies. Surprisingly, the association of Borat with Eastern European identity as another possibly generalised anchor has been rather weak. To some extent that refutes the opinion of scholars who have argued that Borat ridicules the otherness of Eastern Europeans (Wallace, 2008). Perhaps once again it shows the external nature of the definition of Eastern European identity and the vagueness of Eastern Europe as an imagined community.

OBJECTIFYING BORAT: THE FIGHT FOR HUMOUR

The estimation of Baron Cohen's comedic style is another broad theme that intertwines *YouTube* comments on Borat. Despite its institutionalised status, mocumentary is an unconventional genre, and when it is part of such a social object as Borat, it must be objectified. As Torchin (2008, p. 60) suggests, the Borat project "Is thrown into uncertainty as each sequence provides a step backward from verisimilitude, offering a performative documentary about performance and a mockumentary of a documentary of a mockumentary". By elaborating particular guidelines of how Borat should be perceived, the meaning of Borat the character emerges. Baron Cohen's satirical manner as an analytical category covers three dialogically related attitudes towards the hoax: approval; criticism; and acknowledgment of a culturally diverse sense of humour.

Since different arguments come to the fore in praise of Borat's skits, comments supporting Baron Cohen's comedic approach are not necessarily homogeneous. First of all, his freaky way of ridiculing the Brits and Americans generates sympathy. As mentioned earlier, Americans usually become the most visible scapegoats in such situations, while Britain is perceived as a self-critical nation. Baron Cohen is associated with British humour, the category with a positive connotation, elevating Brits above Americans. Rarely, however, is social criticism raised as an intrinsic value of the Borat satire. Instead an immediate affective reaction prevails over Borat's reflections on racism, exaggerated political correctness, homophobia, etc. In other words, Borat's pranks are principally good not because they sketch the problems of contemporary western societies, but because they are simply funny:

The Brits are so much more hysterical to watch when Borat does

his thing. Their patience with this character is incredible. This is classic British humor! (siankane)

But if you look at the history of UK Comedians (lookup Fawlty Towers on Utube as an example) you will find we luuurve to make fun of our national stereotypes (ourselves !) Sacha just moved this onto other nationalities ..... who may not share our sense of humour. But we find it fecking funny... so fuck'em. (gp-fwestie)

Making fun of and stereotyping particular groups and (underdeveloped) nations like Kazakhstan or Romania are the impetus for a negative attitude towards Borat and his style of lampooning people. Yet, it is not so easy to find the same condemning attitude within pro-American comments. They are typically directed at safeguarding the US image rather than denying Baron Cohen's parodies. A number of commentators, however, emphasise the crudeness of Baron Cohen's humour: it is characterised as primitive, cheap, and, hence, amateurish.

What I find disgusting about this movie is that most of the people in the movie seem not to know that they are being made fun of. What gives this guy the right to use people like this? Shame on you Cohen. Hope you made enough money on this piece of crap so you don't have to make any movies again. (riskyshotz)

This humor is for uneducated, ignorant, and unintelligent sick-minded perverts. How can anyone find humor in his constant sexual references to 12 year old girls and animals? How do you find that funny? Why do you find so much humor in normal biological processes such as sexual intercourse? What is so humorous about that? (folkmusic1991)

Apart from the strictly negative attitudes, one may also pinpoint a more moderate approach that reconciles supporters and critics of Baron Cohen's satire. Exceptional though such a balanced stance may be, it simultaneously states that even though Borat can be humiliating or disgusting, he is still funny:

He just makes fun of poor foreign people, which is not fair at all. In England there are lots and lots of homeless people, not to mention about disabled, gays, pedophiles, and so on!! More than in any country in Europe. Anyway, the rest of the "movie" is funny. More or less. (sperantz7)

Responding to the criticism, which increased in 2008/2009 comments, supporters claim those who cannot understand Baron Cohen's social commentary do not possess a normal (British) sense of humour:

Oh my god its not supposed to be the real kazakhstan! get a feckin sense of humor! its just funny bcos he's trying to make himself into a stereotypical kazakh or whatever it is. ok they arent all like that...THATS THE POINT! (SalfordRed89)

You don't seem to understand the parody at all... Sacha Cohen

said it was meant to mock people who would actually BELIEVE
that Kazakhstan is like this... So you're falling in the moron-trap.
Lol (godelike)

Such a diagnosis, which Miranda Campbell (2007, p. 55) has labelled as "transloca-
tion of racism", in turn triggers an explanation of the accurate way the satire must be un-
derstood: its primary aim is to mock Americans and Brits and has nothing to do with
Kazakhstan or Romania. Accordingly, laughing at oneself, which Borat allegedly does, is
assumed to be the benchmark of a good sense of humour. Besides, laughing at oneself legit-
imises the ridiculing of the US and UK as well as the exploitation of other nations as means
of national self-criticism. As Hoechsmann and Cucinelli (2007, pp. 96–97) have argued,
light-heartedness, having a laugh, and not taking things too seriously is, in general, the pre-
vailing ethos of *YouTube*.

In respect to Borat the movie, Bronwen Low and David Smith (2007, p. 33) assert that
differentiation between who gets the joke and who does not has some culturally disturbing
implications: "It departs from satire's model of attacking the powerful, or rather it makes
the cognoscenti the powerful, excludes them from the joke, and has them laughing at the
perceived lumpen, both in the film and in the theatre seats". Implicitly though, comments
that stress the take-it-easy attitude illuminate hegemonic relations: if you do not understand
our humour, you are backward. Consequently, intentions to protect the image of Kazakhs
or other groups are downplayed, because the story is not about them. Moreover, this atti-
tude perhaps will again be endorsed by Western viewers when the sequel My Brother, Bor-
at, directed by Kazakh director Erkin Rakishev, takes revenge on the original movie (Levy
2010).

To sum up, not only is Borat a complex character, but also the genre picked by Sacha
Baron Cohen. The ambiguous approach that oscillates between social commentary and self-
sufficient, below-the-belt humour certainly provokes the objectification of Borat as a generic
phenomenon. The commentators draw a rather sharp line between good and bad humour,
and accordingly, express diverging attitudes towards Baron Cohen's mocumentary: it ac-
quires either the image of distinctive British humour or the image of deliberate humiliation.
Obviously, many commentators attempt to explain the real meaning of Baron Cohen's satire
to reduce the humiliation image; nevertheless, they usually do it at the expense of hege-
monic relations. In line with the ends justifying the means, they implicitly stress that if you
cannot laugh at yourself, you are not civilised and democratic enough. While for some
people humour functions as inclusive discourse, for others it might become exclusive. Like-
wise, the objectification of mocumentary, perhaps, reveals diverse representations of na-
tionalism that constrain commentators' discourse. To some extent those who accept Baron
Cohen's comedic manner lean to support civic nationalism whereas critics exhibit ethnic na-
tionalism.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this paper I have deliberately avoided the expert's views on the satiric qualities
and socio-cultural background of Borat. And I have also disregarded Baron Cohen's talent
and personality. Instead I have focused on the reception of Borat in a consensual universe as
reflected by *YouTube* comments. Tracing the development of major themes, I have sought to
demonstrate the creation and transformation of Borat's social representation in one segment
of public discourse. The analysis of qualitative data has revealed anchoring and objectifica-
tion as the formative processes of Borat's representation.

On a more abstract level, *YouTube* comments about Borat reveal interaction between

different types of social representations. Borat's representation can be characterised as *emancipated representation*, which, as Moscovici (1988, p. 221) argues, has "a certain degree of autonomy with respect to interacting segments of society. They [emancipated representations] have a complimentary function inasmuch as they result from exchanging and sharing a set of interpretations and symbols." With respect to *emancipated representation* each sub-group of *YouTube* community creates its own version of Borat and shares it with others. However, the salience of national identity and discussions about the right satiric manner allude to hegemonic representation that is uniform and coercive by nature and prevails implicitly in all symbolic and affective practices (Moscovici, 1988, p. 221). Attempts to protect nationality or to argue for the right meaning of good satire demonstrate that the reception of Borat is led by rigid definitions of national identity (ethnic vs. civic) and humour (self-criticisms vs. tolerance). In other words, the very hegemonic representations rather than particular aesthetic attitudes to Borat are the most decisive things to be defended; therefore hegemonic representations as "a strict setting of the jokes", to use t'Hart's phrasing, turn Baron Cohen's pranks into a political resource.

The objectification of Borat illuminates the constraints of popular culture, which fuels participatory culture. In particular these constraints may be observed in the consumption of socially sensitive and sophisticated humour as in the case of Baron Cohen. This impossibility of universal satiric discourse is reminiscent of the infamous Monty Python sketch about the funniest joke in the world, which is buried in the Berkshire countryside, "never to be told again". The anchoring of Borat, in turn, shows that *YouTube* in particular and participatory culture in general are not just places where media convergence and collaborative knowledge can thrive, as Jenkins proposes, but they also constitute a consensual universe occupied by social representations of different collective identities. Reception of Borat on *YouTube* illustrates that along with new ways of engaging citizens in public discourse, participatory culture expands the space for cultural practices that protect and reinforce one's nationality on a global scale. Participatory culture seems to be a new opportunity at least for some population segments (e.g. those with technological competencies) to reinforce the social representation of their nationality. As McCrone (2008, p. 319) aptly points out, nationalism is a particularly flexible ideology that has the capacity to mutate into many variants.

The impossibility of universal satirical discourse highlights the constraints of popular culture regarding civic engagement as well. Although social commentary that is based on ethnic humour motivates people to converse about national identity and their own country, the outcomes of such conversation might be somewhat ambiguous. Namely, the genesis of the social representation of Borat illuminates the differentiation of YouTubers in civilised and uncivilised groups according to their ability to comprehend a sophisticated social commentary. Hence, international popular culture attracts people to political topics, but it may also establish hegemonic relations across different cultures. Of course, Borat the character is a very extreme case; however, this case reminds us about the limitations of popular culture as entertainment as well as a resource for political citizenship.

onymous reviewers for many essential comments, which expanded its theoretical perspective.

ENDNOTES

1   Before inventing Borat, Baron Cohen made several attempts in the 1990s at portraying similar characters whose origins shifted from Moldova to Albania.

2   Burgess and Green (2009, p. 82) have speculated that YouTube "is a website that is US-dominated demographically to an extent".

3   All commentaries are left in their original transcription.

4   Chart 1 shows frequency by which categories Kazakhstan* and Kazakhstani* are mentioned in comments. Similar frequency measurement was applied to other nationalities that dominated YouTube comments.

5   The village is shown in the opening scene of the posted video as well as in the movie.

6   After the release of Bruno, Emil Brix, the Austrian ambassador to Britain, urged people to protest against the movie for its "cheap" gags about Adolf Hitler and Josef Fritzl. See: Leach 2009.

7   The presence of Russian and Albanian identities can also be observed in the comments; however, they are less salient and too fragmentary to be analyzed here.

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Public service television's different ways of dealing with a changed media landscape: A comparison of pre-election program formats on Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Belgian public television

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Abstract: Under the influence of a changing international media landscape, political programming on public service television has changed considerably since the beginning of the 1990s. Political television debates and interviews increasingly take place within hybrid program formats, in which traditional stylistic boundaries are challenged. This article focuses on the Belgian example and analyses how two Belgian public service broadcasters, the Dutch-speaking Vlaamse Radio-en Televisieomroep *(VRT) and the French-speaking* Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté française *(RTBF), covered the 2009 European and regional election campaign in terms of presentation and format strategies. Using a qualitative format analysis, the article identifies a number of similarities and differences at the levels of (1) program formats, (2) representation of the public and (3) the role of television journalists. Whilst both public service broadcasters produced their 2009 pre-election broadcasts in modern formats, the VRT election programs were more strongly formatted in terms of alternation, fragmentation and use of pre-produced materials than the RTBF programs which were predominantly based on rather traditional debate formats.*

Keywords: Political television journalism; Political broadcast talk; Election programming; Public service broadcasting; Program formats; Belgium

In Europe, the forms and styles of political television talk have changed substantially since the beginning of the 1990s. Processes of deregulation, privatisation and commercialisation have given rise to stringent program formats, contents and journalistic styles to attract new and broader audiences (e.g. Humphreys, 1996; Karvonen, 2009; Talbot, 2007; Tolson, 2006). Public service broadcasters have increasingly felt the need to take viewing figures and political and economic imperatives into account in their programming policies. The changes in the environment not only made way for entirely new popular television genres, the more classic genres such as news and political television programs have also changed considerably. This re-orientation provoked important societal and academic discussions on the role and legitimacy of contemporary public service broadcasting and political television journalism (e.g. Collins, 1998; Dahlgren, 1995; Franklin, 1997; Harrison and Wessels, 2009; Humphreys, 1996).

European public service broadcasters' responses to this changed context differed and resulted in a variety of new programming strategies (Collins, 1998; Humphreys, 1996). In this respect, Belgium is an interesting case, because its two national public service broadcasters, the Dutch-speaking Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroep (Flemish Radio and Television broadcaster, VRT) and the French-speaking Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté française (Belgian Radio-Television of the French Community, RTBF) responded differently to the challenges they faced. While the French-speaking RTBF has largely adhered to traditional public broadcaster values, the Dutch-speaking VRT has adopted a more market-oriented, competitive media logic (d'Haenens et al., 2009; Van den Bulck and Sinardet, 2007). In this article, we look at whether and how these different answers to a changing media environment are reflected in the broadcasters' approach to political television programming. More specifically, we analyse VRT's and RTBF's coverage of the 2009 European and regional elections[1]. Electoral broadcasts occupied a large share in the programming schedules of both public service broadcasters, but were met with remarkably different perceptions of Flemish and French-speaking social actors. While in Flanders, members of the audience as well as journalists and other opinion makers publically aired several worries about the public television's election programs on the programs' websites and in newspapers – criticising the tight formatting, lack of in-depth elaboration, over-active role of the journalists and celebration of form at the expense of content – such critical voices were heard less often in Belgium's French Community.

In this article, we focus on whether these different perceptions reflect different approaches on the part of VRT and RTBF by analysing how the broadcasters structured, presented and performed the 2009 pre-election broadcasts. Special attention is given to similarities and differences in journalists' roles in the program formats and in the programs' presentational style, studio setting and involvement of the public. We will start by providing a brief sketch of the contextual specificities underlying the two Belgian public service broadcasters' positions and will then discuss the evolutions in the genre of political television programming and the peculiarities of political television talk. The qualitative format analysis probes the most important results regarding the broadcasters' election programs, especially in terms of (1) program formats; (2) representation of the public; and (3) journalists' roles. The article concludes by relating these three levels to each other and by reflecting on their implications for the legitimacy of public service broadcasting and contemporary journalism.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

It is generally acknowledged that in the 1990s a serious change in the television landscape occurred in most Western European countries (see Blumler, 1991; Collins, 1998;

Humphreys, 1996; Tracey, 1998). Previously, national public service broadcasters were the only players in this landscape and enjoyed a monopoly position. However, as processes of deregulation, liberalisation and commercialisation opened the way for other, commercial television stations, public service broadcasters were forced to re-evaluate and re-invent their programming strategies, management structures, traditions and missions (Blumler, 1992). For the first time, public service broadcasters needed to demonstrate an ability to attract and attain broad and diversified audiences. The increased competition in the European broadcasting landscape, and the emphasis on attracting audiences that accompanied it, forced public service broadcasters to try to find a balance between traditional public service values and market-oriented considerations in order to maintain their positions as major players in the television market. Following the advent of commercial broadcasters, European public service broadcasters reacted differently to these fundamental challenges: they took up different positions on the so-called purification-popularisation continuum (Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2008), and took different positions on the continuum between responsible and responsive programming, striking different balances in their programming strategies between what the public *needs* to know and what the public *wants* to know (Brants, 2003).

This diversity in the European public service broadcasting landscape is manifestly reflected in Belgium, where the two public service broadcasters responded in different ways to the arrival of commercial television stations. Since the 1960s, Belgium has had two autonomous broadcasters[2], each connected to one of the two major linguistically defined Communities in Belgium[3]: BRT (later BRTN, and then VRT) for the Flemish Community and RTB (later RTBF) for the French Community[4]. In contrast to other multilingual federal countries, the Belgian public service broadcasters are fully independent of each other and are subject to the audio-visual media regulations and policies of the Communities they serve, which increases possibilities for significant differences between the two (Sinardet et al., 2004).

The first Flemish commercial station VTM (Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij, Flemish Television Company) was founded in 1989 and provoked a crisis of legitimacy for the strongly politicised Flemish public broadcaster, whose audience ratings dropped drastically, making the need for a profound reformation more acute (Dhoest and Van den Bulck, 2007; Saeys, 2007). In the French Community, there was a similar evolution. The foundation of the RTL group commercial station RTL-TVI in 1987 preceded a precarious financial situation and period of internal crisis (Biltereyst, 1997; Lentzen and Legros, 1995; Sinardet et al., 2004). While the Belgian public service broadcasters initially clung to their traditional working methods, several years of declining audiences incited them to recognise that to survive in the ever more complex and competitive television market, they needed to revise their organisational structure, programming strategies and policies. Since 1997, VRT and RTBF have concluded management contracts with, respectively, the Flemish Community and French Community governments. These contracts define the tasks of the public broadcasters and fix the level of public funding for a limited number of years (d'Haenens et al., 2009). The terms of these contracts significantly differ in that the management contracts in Flanders are far more centred on performance criteria and concrete measurable objectives than in French-speaking Belgium (Sinardet et al., 2004, p. 7; Van den Bulck and Sinardet, 2007, p. 62).

Without a doubt, this situation has contributed to VRT's and RTBF's apparently different institutional developments and accents. While VRT seems to adopt a more market-centred logic and aims at reaching large and diversified audiences, RTBF has been shown to tend towards focusing more on traditional public service values in its organisation, programming and policy (d'Haenens et al., 2009, p. 64; Sinardet et al., 2004; Van den Bulck and

Sinardet, 2007). Although RTBF has also been shown to reflect on its programming and partly modernise its formats (Desterbecq, 2005; Le Paige, 2005; Liesenborghs, 2005; Sepulchre, 2005), the broadcaster is generally seen as "less [of] an entertainment, children's and general knowledge broadcaster than is the case for VRT" (d'Haenens et al., 2009, p. 65). Van den Bulck and Sinardet (2007, p. 74) refer to a fading of boundaries in VRT's general programming: in contrast to RTBF, which tends to emphasise provision of information, much of VRT's programming consists of hybrid program formats such as infotainment and politainment.

These differences in Belgium's public service broadcasting provide a basis for debates on the role and legitimacy of both of the broadcasters (Van den Bulck and Sinardet, 2007, p. 62). Many of the criticisms met by the two broadcasters are conflicting. VRT's evolution into a competitive public service broadcaster that focuses on audience maximisation and competition has provoked criticisms about how it distinguishes itself from the commercial broadcasters and the legitimacy of its funding from the Flemish Community. In contrast, RTBF's more defensive and conservative public service broadcasting concept has resulted in loss of market share to its commercial counterpart RTL-TVI, which also threatens its legitimacy.

News and political programming: a genre in evolution

Since the early 1990s there has been an ongoing transformation from "paleo-television" to "neo-television" (Casetti and Odin, 1990), in which entertainment and superficiality have become ever more present features of television programming. Information provision on public service television has adapted to the changing media landscape by changing its form, style and content in order to attract broader audiences and persuade the public to stay tuned. According to Fetzer and Johansson (2008, n.p.), "political discourse in the media has undergone a process of hybridization", in which the formal practices of traditional political broadcast talk are increasingly combined with discourse practices that are typical of other forms of broadcast talk such as talk shows (e.g. Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2001, 2006). In news and political programs, the content has broadened from purely political coverage and debate to include sports, human interest, hobbies, consumerism, etc. In an attempt to attract wider audiences, these programs are delivered in formats that tend to pay less attention to in-depth content and background reporting, and more attention to the presentation and form of the political discussion – often highlighting conflict and competition (Brants, 1998). The imagined audiences are no longer perceived merely as a group of critical citizens, they are also seen as including consumers requiring good qualitative *and* appealing content. In the programs that are shown, the extraordinary and the expert opinion have to make way for the stories and testimonies of "ordinary people", "average Joe", or "the man in the street" (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). According to Murdock (1999, pp. 14, 15), this celebration of experience and the ordinary can be conceived as "the political economy of populism" and "new commercialism".

While, generally, most European public service broadcasters have opted for "softer" political and news programs (Kleemans and Vettehen, 2009, p. 235), the (rather limited) literature on political television formats points out that it would be oversimplified to assume that they have all evolved to infotainment and sensationalist program formats. In some countries, such as Greece, the news and political programming on public service television are indeed increasingly characterised by personalisation and modernisation. In others, such as France, however, one can recognise a rather opposite move as public service broadcasters have chosen to return to or maintain the traditional formats in which extended debate and serious news are central (Lits, 2005, p. 18). In Belgium, several studies on the public service

broadcasters' news programming strategies have shown – in line with the evolutions already mentioned above – that VRT tends to provide softer and more sensational news than RTBF (De Bens and Paulussen, 2005; Kleemans et al., 2008; Sinardet et al., 2004; Van den Bulck and Sinardet, 2007).

THE LEGITIMACY OF POLITICAL TV JOURNALISM

Political television programs have been described as "a key moment in the political news cycle" (McNair, 2000, p. 84) and "a fundamental act of contemporary journalism" (Schudson, 1994, p. 565). However, in the changing environment where information programs increasingly become entertainment products, the legitimacy of journalism is tested. Political journalists operating within political television programs have to cope with the tension between joining the general trend towards what has been called "conversationalisation" (Fairclough, 1995; Fetzer and Weizman, 2006), "informalisation" (Montgomery, 2007), "entertainmentisation" (Karvonen, 2009) and "confrontainment" (Lorenzo-Dus, 2009), on the one hand, and complying with their role as critical political journalists, on the other. This has resulted in a shift from deferential and formal interviews with politicians, to interviewing styles that are often either critical, highly adversarial and conflict-oriented, or informal, with therapeutic and light-hearted discourse styles (Hamo et al., 2010; Neveu, 1999, 2002). In political interviews and television debates, the journalist becomes an ever more active player, holding politicians accountable by assuming not only the role of "tribune of the people", but also that of "arbiter of truth", on the basis of which it is seen as legitimate to make far-reaching evaluations of politicians' utterances (Montgomery, 2007, p. 216). Journalists no longer function merely "as reporters and analysts, but as participants in, and producers of what we all … experience as political reality" (McNair, 2000, p. ix). According to Turner (2005, p. 89), political television and current affairs programs often seek "to use the alibi of journalism's democratic credentials while delivering a content that most of the time deserves no special protection at all". The combination of entertainment with political discourse, together with the "marketization" of broadcast journalism (Thussu, 2007, p. 1), and "the further mixing of information with drama, excitement, colour, and human interest in the topics, formats, and styles of most programmes" (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999, p. 218), are often seen as having detrimental effects on the functioning of contemporary broadcast journalism and on the media's democratic and political role. For others, however, the idea of enhancing citizenship and stimulating political participation and involvement through infotainment genres has democratic potential (e.g. Brants, 1998; Jones, 2005; Street, 1997; van Zoonen, 2005). The result is a branch of literature with divergent viewpoints concerning the possibility of harmonising traditional journalistic and public service broadcasting values with the need to attract broad audiences. In the following, we empirically scrutinise, by means of a qualitative format analysis, how the Belgian public service broadcasters have tried to manage this complex balancing exercise in their 2009 election broadcasts.

FORMAT ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL TELEVISION TALK

Given its public character, political broadcast talk is "a communicative interaction between those participating in discussion, interview, game show or whatever and, at the same time, is designed to be heard by absent audiences" (Scannell, 1991, p. 1). Consequently, participants in political broadcast talk are engaged in two kinds of interaction (Burger, 2005; Fetzer, 2000; Fetzer and Johansson, 2007; Scannell, 1991): (1) a first-frame interaction in which the emphasis is on direct interaction between journalists and politicians, "communication réciproque" (mutual interaction) (Burger, 2005, p. 56); and (2) a second-frame interaction in which the engagement between journalists/politicians and the "over-

hearing audience" is central, "communication unilatérale" (one-way interaction) (Burger, 2005, p. 56). At the level of the first-frame interactions, conversation analysts have studied how journalists and politicians render their interactions, roles and identities relevant at the local level (e.g. Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Emmertsen, 2007; Greatbatch, 1988).

While the interactions between journalists and politicians are an important factor in this study, they are not our core focus. Political television debates, together with dynamic interpersonal interactions, are also about editing procedures, format considerations and visuals, which result in a particular staging or "*mise-en-scène*" (Charaudeau and Ghiglione, 1997). This study focuses specifically on the format and contextual setting in which the studio interactions take place. Within the broad field of media studies, format-related aspects of television have received remarkably little attention. According to Hansen et al. (1998, pp. 190-191), this is due to the taken-for-grantedness of the visual dimensions in analyses of media texts, and the traditional emphasis on language and interaction. In order to map the format strategies used by the public broadcasters in their coverage of the 2009 regional and European elections, the present study analyses the mise-en-scènes of the debates. Since the methodology of format analysis and genre analysis of (political) television programs is still in its infancy (Hansen et al., 1998) and firm guidelines and working methods have yet to be established, we developed our own analytical framework to examine the Belgian public service broadcasters' election coverage. The corpus consists of all VRT and RTBF election programs broadcast in the three weeks prior to the 2009 elections: *Vlaanderen 09* (Flanders 09, one broadcast), *Europa 09* (Europe 09, one broadcast), *Het Groot Debat 09* (The Great Debate 09, one broadcast), *De Stemming 09* (The Vote 09, one broadcast), *TerZake 09* (To the Point 09, a series of 15 broadcasts) and *Het Kopstukkendebat 09* (The Leading Figures Debate 2009, one broadcast) on VRT; and *Huis Clos* (In Camera, six broadcasts), *Duel à la Une* (Headline's Duel, 18 broadcasts), *Répondez @ Leurs Questions* (Answer Their Questions, four broadcasts), *Mise au Point* (Clarification, two broadcasts) and *Le Grand Débat des Présidents* (The Great Leaders' Debate, one broadcast) on RTBF.

These pre-election broadcasts are analysed in terms of participants, setting, program structure, positioning, topics, use of technology and the use of pre-produced materials (see figure 1). Our main focus is on presentation strategies and format features, rather than on the more technical elements such as camera positions, take lengths, editing processes, and lighting. Overall, three factors appear to be crucial for a comparison of VRT's and RTBF's election programs: (1) debate formats and the use of pre-produced materials; (2) the representation of the public; and (3) the role of political television journalists. An in-depth analysis of each of these factors provides a better understanding of the complexities and specificities characterising the political television debates on VRT and RTBF.

DEBATE FORMATS AND THE USE OF PRE-PRODUCED MATERIALS

While extensive political debate and discussion of political viewpoints is central in VRT as well as RTBF election programs, there were some important differences as to how debate is presented and performed. Both broadcasters have invested in (supposedly) appealing, modern and tight formats, but whilst the Flemish election programs were characterised by flashy and rapid formats and included alternations of short, sharp debates, the French-speaking election debates were more sober and tended to revolve around extended in-depth debate and elaboration of politicians' opinions.

The Flemish public service broadcaster's 2009 election programs favoured alternation and variety. Its pre-election broadcasts consisted of short, studio-based debates, with the same or different combinations of the same politicians taking part. In *Het Groot Debat 09*, for instance, eight leading politicians were invited to alternate in debates that lasted approxim-

Debate format	Participants
	Setting
	Program structure
	Positioning of the studio audience
	Positioning of the politicians
	Positioning of the journalists
	How topics are introduced
	Use of technology
	Use of pre-produced format elements
Representation of the public	Role of the studio audience
	Representation of the public opinion and personal expertise
	Audience-involvement
Role of the journalists	Role of political journalists in the overall format
	General tasks

Figure 1: *Overview of the analytical framework*

ately ten minutes. The debates were facilitated by two political journalists and consisted of three politicians discussing a specific topic. Following this, other politicians were incited by a third journalist to comment on the debate. In contrast, the emphasis on alternation in *TerZake 09* was based not so much on a series of short debates involving different politicians, as on the presence of an academic expert commentator, pre-arranged and on-screen visualised topics and pre-produced reportages. Three invited politicians debated three or four topics, visualised on-screen and contextualised either by an academic expert who was physically present or by a three-minute pre-produced reportage presenting the opinion of an 'ordinary citizen' with a personal affiliation to the topic or of an expert from a relevant societal field. In the other VRT election campaign broadcasts (*De Stemming 09*, *Europa 09*, *Vlaanderen 09*), the debates were interspersed with a variety of "eye-catchers" such as musical interventions, expert evaluations, a tribune-test for politicians (figure 2) and a presentation of survey results (figure 3). In other words, while political debate was still the core focus[5], the television producers seemed to aim to keep the audience tuned in by avoiding long, extended debates and adding entertainment-like format elements throughout the programs.

RTBF's programming put a heavier emphasis on extensive and detailed political debate[6]. Two main format-related differences from the Flemish broadcasts stand out: the absence of a studio audience; and the central position of the politicians' argumentation. The

Figure 2: *A tribune-test for a politician in* De Stemming 09

Figure 3: *A journalist's presentation of survey results in* Vlaanderen 09

absence of a studio audience is discussed later in this article, but important to remark here is that RTBF's programming was largely produced within a "behind closed doors"-format, designed to stimulate intimate and confessional talk among politicians that is steered and facilitated by one or more political journalists (Amey, 2009). One program, *Huis Clos*, literally means "behind closed doors" or "in camera": the program highlighted the centrality of politicians' views and excluded the journalist from the physical scene, appearing only as a virtual representation (cfr. figure 4 and 5). The face-to-face discussion between two politicians was the centrepiece of the program.

This emphasis on in-depth debate among politicians in RTBF's election programs contrasts with the more entertainment-like formats of Flemish programming. However, the

Figure 4 & 5: *Face-to-face format and physical absence of the journalist in* Huis Clos

Flemish and the French-speaking election programs cannot simply be seen in terms of fast, alternating formats versus extended, classical debate formats. A move to more modern and appealing formats can also be identified in the French-speaking programs. Whereas the VRT programs used appealing – in the sense of supposedly attracting broader audiences – formats by calling upon introductory or transitional intermezzo's (in the form of expert commentaries, poll result presentations, contextualising and problematising film reports, etc.), RTBF tended to invoke confrontational frames during the actual debate. The debate frame was often centred explicitly on provoking conflict, for instance, by imposing a game-frame (e.g. *Duel à la Une*, where debate was governed by the rules of the word game Scrabble (figure 6)) or a sports-frame (e.g. *Huis Clos*, where politicians were allowed to speak for a certain length of time measured by a stopwatch shown on screen (figure 7)).

AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL TELEVISION DEBATES: SPECTATOR, PLAYER, OR CITIZEN?

Figure 6: *Scrabble-debate in* Duel à la Une

Figure 7: *Sports-like timing countdown measuring speaking time in* Huis Clos

Within public service broadcasting institutions, portraying the public as co-players or performers in television programs has become the norm and can be seen as both an attempt to involve and represent "citizens" in the public sphere, and as a strategy to engage viewers (Enli, 2008; Syvertsen, 2004). As Syvertsen (2004) states somewhat pessimistically, "the main focus is on turning viewers into *customers* or using participants in order to gain large *audiences*" (p. 373, emphasis in original). The program formats of the Belgian public service broadcasters prioritise the portrayal of the public in their election programs. Both the Flemish and French-speaking public service broadcasters seem to support a participatory idea of democracy and largely let "people set the agenda" (Strömback, 2005, p. 340) for their televised election debates, although with important differences at the levels of representation and involvement. All the VRT election programs had a studio audience whose role was rather passive – one of 'being there', of being spectators to the ongoing debates, applauding or laughing when required[7]. The introduction to the program Het Groot Debat 09 made this spectator-role explicit, with the audience welcoming the politicians as if they were boxers or gladiators entering the arena. The host introduces the participating politicians in a theatrical way, then the politicians make their way to the stage, walking between ranks of audience members who offer encouragement in the form of loud applause and handshakes (figure 8).

Only in the one-time episode of *Vlaanderen 09* did a journalist address and interview some members of the studio audience who were then allowed to offer their opinion on the

Figure 8: *Entrance of a politician in the studio of* Het Groot Debat 09

topic. In this program, the studio audience acted mainly as "contextualisers" for the subsequent debate, relating what was often a strictly political and pre-arranged topic to their personal experience. This emphasis on accentuating the direct relevance of a topic for people's everyday lives could be found in most of VRT's programs, and is possibly used as a way to attract viewers' attention. The short reportages that set the context for a subsequent debate's topic (e.g. TerZake 09, *Europa 09*) often represented laypeople directly affected by or affiliated with the topic. While the role of the studio audience in VRT's television debates is quite restricted and passive, the "ordinary man" was all the more represented in pre-produced reportages. Many of the VRT debates were preceded by a short (approximately three minutes) filmed report of a real citizen, whose story provides context for the debate. For instance, in an episode of TerZake 09, a debate among three left-wing politicians on early retirement was preceded by a short film report of a 55-year old train conductor who has worked hard all his life and wants to retire (figures 9 and 10). In the ensuing debate, the two journalists used this reportage as the starting point to open the debate and to try to get the politicians to take a position on this man's situation.

The Flemish 2009 election campaign broadcasts paid ample attention to the ordinary civilian and personal opinion in their formats. This "audience-as-part-of-the-format" frame was far less common in the French-speaking programs; the public was cast in the role of cit-

Figure 9 & 10: *Film report of a train conductor before a debate in* TerZake 09

izens who are expected to participate actively in public debate and set the agenda. With the exception of Répondez @ Leurs Questions, the RTBF programs did not have a studio audience. Also, in contrast to the Flemish election programs in which the topics under discussion were to a large extent pre-planned and decided on by the production team (cf. the on-screen presentation of topics, film reports, expert's introducing contributions), the viewers of the French-speaking programs were much more directly involved in the interactional and topical development of the broadcasts. In Répondez @ Leurs Questions, which focused entirely on citizen representation, two members of the public were given journalistic status and acted as co-interviewers, actively participating in the studio discussion by asking questions, interrupting the politicians and urging them to take responsibility. In this context, Fetzer and Johansson (2008, n.p.) speak of a "temporarily professional public discourse identity" in which audience members are given the legitimacy to take on the role of a professional interviewer.

However, this role of citizen-as-journalist may not be as valuable or as authentic as it may appear at first sight: the professional political journalist in the program introduces the citizens' questions and accounts, implying he or she knows what they will say. Whether RTBF's formats of involvement are, then, more "democratic" than VRT's more orchestrated ways of involving the public as part of the format, is another matter. The active participation of the audience in the RTBF studio settings, either as co-interviewers or as opinion makers via e-mail, SMS, or phone-ins, may as well be orchestrated and chosen selectively by the journalists to reinforce their own journalistic legitimacy. As will be explored below, the presence and concrete representation of "a" public opinion, in whatever form, can bolster the journalists' control and position in the interaction since it allows reference to "the people", "this man", or "this concrete case" in order to hold the politicians responsible and force them to respond to difficult questions.

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL JOURNALISTS

In contemporary political television, the traditional conception of a political television debate in which politicians interact under the moderation and control of a political journalist clearly is no longer the only form. "Ordinary people" and experts, for instance, have been increasingly legitimised to vent their opinions, make evaluations, hold the political field responsible and pose critical questions to politicians (Neveu, 1999, 2002). Of course, this situation has important repercussions for the role, position and legitimacy of the political television journalists working within this context. While, traditionally, it was the exclusive domain of political journalists to ask questions, to charge politicians in front of an overhearing audience, to set the agenda and frame the politician's contributions, some of this legitimacy has been yielded to laypeople and experts, both of whom have gradually assumed an important actor status. Our analysis shows that format strategies and approaches to audience involvement can have a crucial influence on how political journalists behave,

what they are expected to do and how they address politicians.

As described earlier, the Flemish public service television election programs were more tightly formatted by using alternation, making extended use of pre-produced materials and including non-debate frames than the French-speaking programs. As a result, the journalists hosting the VRT programs needed to be able to deal with these segmented formats and ensure a smooth flow through the use of skilful transitions between the direct studio interactions and the pre-produced format elements. This adds to the complexity of the journalists' role in the VRT programs since they are responsible both for moderating the debate and questioning the politicians, and for ensuring a smooth "ribbon of broadcasting" (Goffman, 1981, p. 262). In some programs (*Europa 09*, Het Groot Debat 09, *Vlaanderen 09*), this complex role-play is managed by dividing roles among several journalists. For instance, one journalist introduces an upcoming pre-produced reportage and another moderates the debate and controls the questions. In the more traditional debate formats on RTBF, there was less need for such a distribution of roles among journalists. The only occasion when they shifted from the debate to other format elements was to introduce questions sent in by viewers, or to switch the focus to a reporter in a call-centre. In one program series (*Huis Clos*), the role of the journalist was strongly played down: she did not appear in the physical studio setting at all (see figure 5). This physical absence of the journalist seems to point to the broadcaster's intention to reduce the journalist's control over the interaction and highlight the face-to-face debate between two politicians. However, although the journalist in this example can no longer steer the debate directly, she can still intervene at any time in the debate.

Both the Flemish and French-speaking political television journalists need to demonstrate their competence as media professionals, and their skill in handling and putting into practice continuously demanding format requirements (see Carpentier, 2005). As Ytreberg (2004, pp. 684-685, emphasis in original) states, the journalist "in many ways *is* the format" in that he or she needs to put the format requirements into practice in the local development of the program. Although Neveu (1999, pp. 404, 403) claims that this leads to a "delegitimization of political journalists" because "their pretensions to be the translators of the public's worries and concerns" are considerably weakened certainly makes sense, we are not convinced that this necessarily leads to a loss of power for the journalists (see also De Smedt and Vandenbrande, 2011; Kroon Lundell, 2009, p. 186). In our view, the embodiment of "public opinion" in real people through their representation in film reports, their questions via e-mail, SMS, or phone-ins, or their direct participation in political television debates, opens up possibilities for the journalists to uphold their traditional public service ethos, rather than weakening it. For instance, reference to real people who are visually represented, and to their real life stories when posing a complex question to a politician, reduces the risk that the journalist will be criticised for exceeding the boundaries of neutrality or for being adversarial. The political journalist can hold politicians more directly accountable and press for a direct answer if they can confront them with the case of a real person or by pointing to a member of a physically present audience. This enables the journalists to protect and defend their status as political journalists. On the basis of the present analysis, it would seem that political television journalists are facing a new test, which is to cope with a repartition and revision of traditional political journalist roles while demonstrating their skills as media professionals able to participate in good and appealing television (see De Smedt and Vandenbrande, 2011).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has provided an overview of the presentation and format strategies used by the Belgian public service broadcasters, VRT and RTBF, in their coverage of the 2009 European and regional election campaign. Both broadcasters were shown to have adopted the general international tendencies in election coverage and political broadcasting, such as the incorporation of neo-televisual features and hybrid program formats, in which traditional stylistic boundaries are no longer valid. While the qualitative format analysis showed that both VRT and RTBF made use of modern and supposedly appealing formats for their 2009 pre-election broadcasts, we identified a number of differences at the levels of program formats, representation of the public and the role repertoire of journalists. The analysis showed that flashy formats, fast-paced debate and alternation constituted the core production features of the VRT pre-election programs. In these formats, the public is positioned mostly as a studio audience, as "spectators" at a performance, or as "players" voicing their everyday concerns in short pre-produced reportages. As a result of these demanding format requirements, the journalists hosting the VRT programs are obliged to act as critical political journalists and moderators of the debate, while also demonstrating their skills as competent media professionals, able to make good television programs and effectuate the pre-produced format frames. In the case of RTBF, extended debate, game- or sports-like elements and audience participation played a central role in the formats. As the RTBF programs strongly emphasised political debate and involved the public more actively in the programs' interactional development, the journalists tended to be facilitators of public debate, allowing the public to vent its concerns directly to the politicians and centralising the politicians' contributions.

These differences presumably reflect the specific historical context and evolution of these broadcasters. The fact that RTBF's election coverage is based more strongly on traditional debate formats than the VRT coverage, reflects the tendency for RTBF to uphold a more traditional conception of public service broadcasting and for VRT to go follow market-related and economic imperatives. To what extent and through which mechanisms the differences between VRT and RTBF election programs effectively are a result of historically developed differences regarding the political and media contexts – including the ideas about what politics is and should be and what role the public broadcaster has to play in it – of Flemish and Francophone Belgium cannot be answered unequivocally on the basis of our analysis. Therefore, a historical analysis would be useful, as it would enable claims about how election programming has evolved over time in terms of format, approach to the public and the roles and expectations of political television journalists.

In academic literature (and in public debate) there has been significant criticism of the developments in current affairs and political programming, denouncing its hybrid formats and its celebration of form at the expense of not only content, but also of good journalism and decent public service broadcasting (e.g. Thussu, 2007; Turner, 2005). The present study has indicated that broadcasters indeed seem to put high value on form and style in their political programming. However, it is by no means clear how this needs to be evaluated in terms of democratic, journalistic and public service broadcasting values. On the one hand, VRT's heavy reliance on portraying "ordinary people" and RTBF's strong stimulation of political participation through interactivity can be positively evaluated from a democratic point of view, as politicians are extensively confronted with and held directly accountable through the citizenry's viewpoints. On the other hand, however, critical questions could be raised about public service broadcasters' use of stringent program formats for political content, as was particularly the case in VRT's election broadcasts. In a critical reading, the performed discussions and interactions could be perceived as nothing more

than a semblance of authentic debate, behind which a powerful production team is operating, steering the content and programs' development through the use of numerous pre-planned and pre-scripted features.

ENDNOTES

1   On 7 June 2009, coincidently with the European elections, Belgium held regional elections, i.e. elections for the governments of the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community, Brussels-Capital Region and the German-speaking Community. While regional issues predominantly overshadowed the public service broadcasters' pre-election coverage, some debates or programs were explicitly centred on European matters.

2   In 1977, BRF (Belgischer Rundfunk), a public service broadcaster for the much smaller German-speaking Community, was founded. Since this broadcaster is quite marginal in the Belgian audio-visual landscape, we focus only on the broadcasters of the Flemish and French Communities.

3   Belgium, roughly speaking, is divided in three linguistic Communities dealing with so-called 'personal' matters (the Dutch-speaking Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and three Regions dealing with economic matters (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region). The linguistic Communities are tied to a territory. The Flemish Community has jurisdiction over Flanders and co-jurisdiction with the French Community over Brussels. The French Community has jurisdiction over Wallonia and co-jurisdiction with the Flemish Community over Brussels.

4   The Belgische Radio en Televisieomroep (Belgian Radio and Television broadcaster (BRT)), later Belgische Radio en Televisie Nederlandse uitzendingen (BRTN), and now Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroep (Flemish Radio and Television broadcaster (VRT)) serves the Flemish Community and Radio-Télévision Belge (Belgian Radio and Television (RTB)), and later Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté française (Belgian Radio-Television of the French Community (RTBF)) serves the French Community.

5   A supplementary and limited quantitative analysis shows that in the Flemish election programs, 60.5% of the total broadcasting time is devoted to political debate.

6   The quantitative count shows an average of 92.7% of debate time in the RTBF programs.

7   In some VRT broadcasts, the audience warm-up is portrayed on-screen.

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Digital Media as Classified and Classifying: The Case of Young Men in Sweden

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Abstract: Digital media[1] are widely talked about as a democratising force. As internet access proliferates, it is implied, structural constraints will dissolve and bring greater equality – if not instantly, but gradually as today's youth, the digital generation, come of age and agents of the old, non-digital order pass away. Thus, the alleged boundlessness of digital media is thought of as somehow having unbound young people from the larger social structure of power relations. Drawing on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, the present article examines the significance of social class for the ways in which young Swedish men perceive, interpret and make use of digital media in their everyday lives. The results suggest that class, through the workings of habitus, shapes the young men's approaches to education, leisure and the future, which, in turn, tend to generate divergent readings of digital media. Those who are privileged in terms of cultural and economic capital think and make use of digital media in compliance with the perceived moral order of digital goods and practices as instituted and imposed by the educational system, for example, whereas those disprivileged in this respect, although recognising the dominant scheme of classification and valuation of such goods and practices, tend to use them in ways that are at odds with it, thereby contributing to the workings of symbolic violence, i.e. to their own subordination.

Keywords: Digital media, Consumption, Morality, Young people, Social Class, Habitus

In terms of internet access, young people in Sweden no doubt are well-equipped for making use of digital media and benefiting from its goods. However, access to the internet is not the same thing as using it and certainly not the same as using it in ways that make real the ascribed potentials of digital media. The dominant discourse on the internet asserts that it will bring about a more democratic society in which long-established power relations are over-thrown, and that the ones who will realise this vision are the digital generation—the so-called *Digital Natives* (Prensky, 2001) or *N-Geners* (Tapscott, 1997)—i.e. those who have grown up with, and so are assumed to know, digital technology (for a critique, see Buckingham, 2008; Selwyn, 2003). What is left unsaid by this discourse is what separates young people from each other and what unites them with previous generations, i.e. the his-

torical social structures that have taken form through and continuously inform the practices of history-making agents. To assume that the internet by itself will abolish such structures amounts to the technological deterministic fallacy (Murdock, 2004; Williams, 1974). Even if digital media carry the potential of greater equality, we cannot confuse the potential with the real. In order to avoid this, more empirical research is needed on the ways in which digital media are contextually appropriated, while at the same time accounting for how these appropriations are structurally enabled and constrained and how they serve to reproduce and/or transform the social order.

The present article contributes to the literature on young people's internet use by examining the significance of social class for how young Swedish men perceive, interpret and make use of digital media in their everyday lives, and *vice versa*, i.e. the significance of these perceptions, interpretations and uses for social class. More specifically, it does so by locating class and digital media in the family-school nexus and by considering, first, the contribution of the educational system to the generalisation of a particular scheme of classification and valuation of digital goods and practices and, second, its potential classed outcomes.

Contrary to postmodern claims about individualisation and the decreasing significance of tradition and a range of long-established social categories—not least social class (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Pakulski and Waters, 1996)—the basic premise here is the continued relevance of class as a concept for understanding social life in modern Western societies – not only in the sense that agents are (objectively) differentiated due to the unequal distribution of various forms of capital, i.e. in terms of conditions of existence, but also in the sense that these differences are embodied and (subjectively) sensed, and so tend to organise the ways in which agents navigate themselves in the social world, thereby reproducing and/or transforming the existing class structure. In accordance with this Bourdieuian perspective on social class (further outlined below), class consciousness and political formation are potential elements of class, though they are not necessary conditions for its existence as a social force. In this respect, the practical sense of social proximity/distance must not even be interpreted in terms of social class (Skeggs, 1997), because contrary to, for example, gender differences, which are ascriptive in character, social classes are also (re)produced through the workings of capitalism as an economic system, and so they comprise, but are not reducible to, subjective experience and identities (Sayer, 2005).

To say that class and gender are two different things is not to imply that they are separated in everyday practice. Rather, they inevitably interact with each other (see Connell, 2005; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997), for example in shaping the relationship to digital media among the young men studied here. Though this interaction is de-emphasised in the analysis below, it must be stressed that these men, like all men – including men who produce knowledge about men – are *gendered* agents. Throughout history, (male-dominated) social (class) theory and analysis have served to maintain gender inequalities precisely by not acknowledging this, i.e. by treating men/masculinity either as the unspoken norm of humanity, or as an articulated, yet unproblematic, pre-given (Hearn, 1998). Today, research on men/masculinity has established itself as a discipline generally characterised by a commitment to both gender theory and feminism. Masculinity, when understood as socially constructed – in relation to femininity, but also to class, race/ethnicity, etc. – has thus been increasingly problematised in terms of (patri-archal) power and violence. Connell (2005), for instance, argues that different masculinities are associated with different positions of power and, more specifically, she talks about a hegemonic masculinity as dominant in relation to marginalised and subordinate masculinities. Against the backdrop of contemporary technological changes, labour market transformations (e.g. declining industrial employment) and crisis tendencies in the gender order (see Connell, 2005; Hirdman, 1990), it is important to

consider the ways in which young men, from different classes, construct forms of masculinity through the use of digital media in the context of school and family, because this can yield insights about inequalities in terms of both gender and class.

EMPIRICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CLASS: RECENT FINDINGS

Sweden is often considered an egalitarian country due to its relatively small economic divides and the fact that access to higher education is free of charge. However, current research clearly indicates the continued significance of social class in a range of respects. A report from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2010) demonstrates a significant increase in income inequality since the early 1990s, and defines more than ten percent of Swedes as relatively deprived in 2007. Another study estimates that about 220,000 Swedish children were living in poverty in 2008 (Salonen, 2010). Furthermore, the increase in social mobility came to a halt in the 1980s and 1990s (Jonsson, 2004), and parents' educational level is still important for who attends higher education (Statistics Sweden, 2010). These inequalities, moreover, are still manifested in different lifestyles, cultural practices, and attitudes in a range of areas (see Oskarson, 2008; Svallfors, 2004), which suggests limits to the assumed individualisation process. Hence, no matter how class is conceptualised, there seems to be limited empirical support for the widespread idea of Sweden being a classless society.

Thus far, the significance of social class for young people's digital media consumption has not been examined to a great extent, and certainly not in Sweden. One recent survey, accounting only for questions of access and rate of internet use, shows that parents' educational level correlates positively with the latter among the youngest, but, otherwise, has limited impact (Findahl, 2010). Internationally, however, more studies have been conducted, many of them looking more closely at the significance of class for *how* digital media are approached and used among young people. Put briefly, the general conclusion to be drawn from these is that class matters – in terms of (quality of) access, interest, and frequency, breadth and type of use (Lee, 2008; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; North et al, 2008). Nevertheless, knowledge of the relations between class and digital media use remains quite limited. It is therefore important to further unravel the complex relationship between youth, class and digital media as manifested in different contexts.

CONCEPTUALISING CLASS AND DIGITAL MEDIA

TECHNOLOGIES-AS-TEXTS

The approach to digital media technology adopted here builds on the idea of technologies-as-texts, i.e. as artefacts that do not carry their own intrinsic meaning, but become meaningful through social and symbolic processes of production, marketing, consumption, regulation, etc. (du Gay et al, 1997; Mackay, 1997). This is not to say that digital technology lacks distinctive properties, but rather that these properties are shaped, partly by political and economic interests (Chadwick, 2006; Mosco, 2004), and partly by the ways in which they are appropriated by users in different contexts (Jansson, 2010; Miller and Slater, 2000; Olsson, 2006). This way of conceptualising technology as socially shaped, owes much to Williams' (1974) critique of technological determinism, as well as to Hall's (1980) communication model, which considers media texts as being encoded with a preferred reading, which is then supported, negotiated or opposed by the audience at the moment of decoding (Mackay and Gillespie, 1992). Looking at digital technologies as texts, then, implies that certain readings, i.e. interpretations and uses of them, more than others, are in line with the interests of the governmental and commercial bodies struggling for control over their meaning. In the education system, for instance, digital media may become part not only of

school's curricula, but also of its officially sanctioned moral education and classification/valuation of knowledge and abilities, such that certain digital goods and practices are judged as socially and morally valuable and desirable, while others are not.

<center>*CAPITAL AND HABITUS*</center>

In examining the significance of social class for how young men perceive, interpret and use digital media, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu is brought into play. It allows us to study digi-tal media use as embedded in everyday life, without losing track of the ways in which it is enabled and/or constrained by social structures. For Bourdieu (1984), class cannot be reduced to strictly economic relations. Rather, he argues, agents and groups of agents are objectively differentiated in a social space of relations by their overall volume and composition of the forms of capital that are effective, i.e. operate as power resources in this space, but also by changes over time in the volume and structure of their capital. In addition to (a) *economic capital* (income, wealth, inheritance, etc.), the main forms of capital are (b) *cultural capital* – which can exist as embodied (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body), objectified (cultural goods of various kinds), and institutionalised (educational qualifications) – and (c) *social capital*, i.e. the actual or potential resources linked to relationships and group memberships (Bourdieu, 1986). When these forms of capital are perceived and recognised as legitimate, Bourdieu (1989) speaks of them in terms of (d) *symbolic capital*.

For Bourdieu, then, class is a relation of dominance which is constituted in the material as well as the symbolic realm, i.e. in the objective conditions of existence and in the minds and bodies of agents. The struggle over capital is fought on unequal terms not only because the forms of capital are unequally distributed and transmitted intergenerationally within the family (Bourdieu, 1986), but also because access to symbolic capital entails the power to define the very terms of this struggle. For instance, in order to achieve academic success, agents entering the field of education must comply with its established norms, according to which practices, abilities, manners, etc. are valued, which, in turn, tends to favour those who are already habituated to these norms, i.e. children from highly educated families (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977). Insofar as these unequal terms are taken for granted, i.e. *misrecognised*, one can speak of a *symbolic violence*, i.e. "... the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 167).

From the very start, therefore, agents have different life chances, which makes certain life trajectories more likely than others. Bourdieu postulates that this is due to the complicity of social position/habitat and disposition/habitus. Agents who share similar class positions in social space have in common certain conditions and so tend to incorporate similar dispositions – schemes of perceptions, appreciations and actions – i.e. a similar *habitus*. This, in turn, tends to condition them to the conditions characteristic of their positions and, consequently, tends to reproduce the existing class structure (Bourdieu, 1984, 1987, 1989). Habitus, then, explains why agents from highly educated families often feel more at home in the field of education than do agents whose families lack educational merits. They have acquired a habitus that fits the field; without knowing why, they know how to act in order to succeed. But since habitus entails the capacity not only to produce classifiable goods and practices, but also to perceive and appreciate (i.e. classify) such goods and practices, this sense of one's place/class is necessarily also a sense of the place/class of others, i.e. a sense of social proximity/distance, by which agents navigate themselves in the social space (Bourdieu, 1984, 1989). Habitus is the objective social order embodied, which is why agents who are short of the capital necessary for success in the educational field often take for granted the rules of the game, thereby contributing, though not deliberately, to the work-

ings of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1987, 1989).

<center>*CLASSES AND CLASSIFICATIONS*</center>

For Bourdieu, consequently, the class struggle is not only a struggle over material re-sources, but also a classification struggle, i.e. a symbolic struggle over the "... legitimate vis-ion of the social world and of its divisions" (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 13). In this struggle, which is fought in the most diverse fields of practice (e.g. education, digital media), agents and groups are unequally armed because of their different access to capital, and furthermore, the social world cannot be constructed in just any way:

> "In the struggle to make a vision of the world universally known and recognized, the balance of power depends on the symbolic capital accumulated by those who aim at imposing the various visions in contention, and to the extent to which these visions are themselves grounded in reality." (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 15)

Hence, Bourdieu (1987) argues, the chances for dominated visions of social reality to be-come constituted and prevail are small – first, because they tend to not exist in the minds and bodies (i.e. habitus) of the dominated and, second, because the dominant continuously try to impose their own vision, by means of which they can legitimise their privilege.

Deploying these ideas in relation to young men's interpretations and uses of the in-ternet and its associated goods and practices implies, then, that neither the latter nor the former are of equal worth, and that the dominant scheme of classification and valuation ac-cording to which they are judged is not neutral to social class in its causes or in its effects. For instance, the educational system – focused on here because of its authority to institute and impose such schemes – manifests itself through a class of agents, unified by an invest-ment of time and energy in the acquisition of legitimate cultural capital and, consequently, by an interest in reproducing its value – not through conscious calculation, but through habitus in action. Hence, its members will be inclined to classify not only digital goods and practices in line with this interest, but also the agents who, due to their natal class, enter the field of education with unequal access to legitimate cultural capital, and who therefore, through the workings of habitus, will tend to interpret and make use of digital media both differently and more or less homologous to the particular scheme of classification/valuation of digital goods/practices as generalised through education. In this sense, digital media can be understood as both classified and classifying—symbolically, that is, but with potential material consequences, insofar as educational attainment tends to give access to the kinds of goods and practices that are commonly valued but scarcely available.

<center>**METHODOLOGY**</center>

As we have seen, Bourdieu's approach to social class is complex, but at its core is a relational mode of thinking, which gives primacy to comparative methods. The present art-icle builds on qualitative data from a comparative case study, which was carried out in a large Swedish city during the autumn of 2009 and involved twelve young men (age 16–18) who were interviewed individually in their (upper secondary) schools[2]. The schools/study programs were selected so as to obtain male informants who were differentiated in social space due to their access to the main forms of capital. Educational choices were held to be expressions of social class and gender, mediated by habitus. Table 1 offers an overview of the sampling.

The interviews involved three general themes: (a) a set of background questions; (b)

School	School type	Study program	Informants (age)
A	Preparatory for higher education (private)	Social science	Carl (16), Neil (16)
A	Preparatory for higher education (private)	Natural science	Eddie (16)
B	"	Social science	Ian (17), Robert (18), Oscar (17)
C	Vocationally-oriented (public)	Vehicle	Jimmy (18), Gökhan (18)
D	"	Individual	Patrick (16), John (17), Simon (17), Daniel (16)

Table 1: *The schools, study programs and informants included in the study. Note that almost all privately owned schools in Sweden are open to all and free of charge owing to a tax-funded voucher system. Also note that the Individual Program is set up for students who did not make the grade in Swedish, English and/or Mathematics in elementary school, and who therefore cannot enter regular study programs in upper secondary school. The informants' real names have been changed due to ethical considerations.*

perceptions/uses of media in general; and (c) perceptions/uses of digital media. There was plenty of room for the interviewees to speak freely and at length, which regularly caused new questions to arise. The length of the interviews varied between 50 and 90 minutes, and they were all recorded and later transcribed. A comparative thematic analysis was then conducted, guided by the conceptual tools of Bourdieu. Before going into this, however, the complexity of Bourdieu's class concept requires some critical reflection on official class schemes and everyday class distinctions as well as on the classification carried out in this study.

The most recent official Swedish class definition is based on occupation and comprises three main categories with a number of subcategories: (a) *manual workers* (unskilled/skilled employees in goods/service production), (b) *non-manual employees* (assistant non-manual employees, lower/higher level; intermediate non-manual employees; professionals and other higher non-manual employees; upper-level executives), and (c) *employers* (self-employed professionals; self-employed other than professionals and farmers; farmers) (Statistics Sweden, 1982). Such a class distinction might be useful for certain purposes, but it lacks the flexibility and multidimensionality of Bourdieu's approach. He argues that social class cannot be reduced to singular indicators such as income, occupation or educational level, but must rather be constructed, in the course of research, by taking into account "... the structure of relations between all the pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 106). These pertinent properties amount to the forms of capital – including symbolic capital, which adds another dimension to Bourdieu's approach in that it recognises the importance of the class distinctions as recognised and enacted by agents (through habitus). For Bourdieu, thus, class boundaries are neither clear-cut nor pre-given, but have to be empirically delineated.

In this study, two classes have been constructed on the basis of the informants' accounts of their parents' educational level and occupational position, employed here as rough but sufficient indicators of family access to (a) legitimate cultural capital and (b) economic capital (income) (see Table 2). Obviously, multiple classes and class fractions might be constructed from these criteria, but in this study a dichotomous classification seems reasonable, first, because parents with higher education also tended to have higher occupational positions (e.g. lawyer, teacher, small entrepreneur, associate professor, veterinarian) than

THE PRIVILEGED		THE DISPRIVILEGED	
Informant (age)	**School**	**Informant (age)**	**School**
Carl (16)	A	Eddie (16)	A
Neil (16)	A	Gökhan (18)	C
Ian (17)	B	Jimmy (18)	C
Oscar (17)	B	Daniel (16)	D
Robert (18)	B	Patrick (16)	D
		John (17)	D
		Simon (17)	D

Table 2: *The classes as constructed on the basis of different family access to (a) legitimate cultural capital (defined by parents' educational level), and (b) economic capital (defined by parents' occupation). Note that these classes are almost entirely homologous to the structure of educational choices.*

did the parents without higher education (e.g. medical secretary, child minder, customer service employee, unemployed) and, second, because the young men tended to separate themselves from each other along these lines in terms of perceptions, aspirations, choices, practices, etc. — in terms of lifestyles, that is, understood as symbolic expressions of social class position.

Consequently, informants with highly educated parents (and relatively high occupations) have been assigned to one class, while informants whose parents lack higher education (and occupy relatively low positions in the labour market) have been assigned to another. These classes will henceforth be called *the privileged* and *the disprivileged* (i.e. in terms of family access to legitimate cultural capital and economic capital).

Considering that this classification is done on the basis of family access to legitimate cultural capital and economic capital, rather than with reference to the political and economic relations of capitalist societies, these terms are better suited than, for example, *the capitalist class/es* and *the working class/es*. They are also preferable to the technical jargon of the official Swedish class definition, partly because occupation is not the single criteria employed, and partly because it fails to do justice to the symbolic and deeply sensed dimensions of class, which constitute an important part of the class concept as delineated and operationalised above. In contrast, *the privileged* and *the disprivileged* are terms that not only capture the relational nature and historicity of class and capital, but also manage to say inequality without fixing it to a particular property, belonging to either the material or the symbolic realm. And contrary to technical definitions of occupational categories, such as *intermediate non-manual employees*, being *the privileged* or *the disprivileged* is also something that is subjectively sensed.

THE CONTEXT OF CONSUMPTION

In order to better understand the significance of class for the ways in which young men perceive, interpret and make use of digital media, it is necessary to locate this complex relationship in the context of their everyday lives and, more specifically, to consider the family-school nexus. The consumption of digital media does not take place in a void, but constitutes a part of the young men's general lifestyles. Being brought up in families with unequal access to capital, the young men seem to have incorporated class-distinctive habituses, which tend to shape not only their thoughts and actions in relation to school and leisure, but also their future aspirations. The privileged males are clearly more enthusiastic

about school than the disprivileged. Neil, for instance, describes himself as "committed" to his education, thinks going to school is "fun", and expresses a will to "perform well" in order to get "a good education and a good job". Patrick, in contrast, thinks of going to school as "boring" and would rather "hang out with friends" – "but", he says, "you have to study if you want to get a job". These accounts reveal not only dissimilar thoughts and feelings about school, but also the presence of the future in the young men's everyday lives. Like Neil, the privileged males tend to perceive their current education as a means of providing themselves with a good education and career, thereby complying with the rules of the game in the educational field, whereas the disprivileged, in line with Patrick, tend to conceive of it more as a necessary evil that must be endured in order to get a job.

The construction of future aspirations seems to be carried out under structural constraints, insofar as the workings of habitus cause the privileged males to perceive higher education as a matter of course, more or less, and to aim for relatively prestigious occupations (e.g. journalist, diplomat). Among the disprivileged males, in turn, some have typical (male) lower-class occupations in mind (e.g. welder, janitor), while others aim for professions requiring a higher education, or for careers related to their hobby. In these cases, however, a good deal of uncertainty is involved. Eddie, for example, wants to be a doctor, but does not think he can get the grades necessary to get into medical school, while Daniel, who wants to be a professional e-sports player, stresses the difficulties in realising this dream and paints an ambivalent picture of his future, speaking of carpentry or work in a game store as alternative scenarios. "Or", he says, "I'll simply be one of those who work at a supermarket". In aspiring to positions beyond their natal class, these young men show that the complicity between social position and disposition is not absolute. Yet their habitus seems to exert a certain force on them, causing them to doubt their ability to transcend the constraints of class.

The general picture, then, is still one in which the disprivileged males feel bad about school and uncertain about their future career (unless they aspire to lower-class jobs), while the privileged assign value to and invest time and effort in their education (i.e. in the acquisition of legitimate cultural capital) – sometimes with a certain profession in mind, but mostly in order to keep as many doors open as possible. This also has a bearing on how the young men conceive of their leisure time.

The privileged males tend to interpret and use their spare time by drawing on the idea of a productive leisure. Time out of class is conceptualised as a scarce resource to be carefully invested in order to acquire future benefits in the struggles of the social field. This must not be a deliberate strategy, but is better understood as a product of habitus. The idea of a productive leisure, geared towards education and a future career, becomes manifest in their use of spare time for homework, extra work, voluntary work and legitimate hobbies such as sports or music. It also shapes their valuation of media goods and practices.

Carl, for example, has almost stopped watching television ("just a way of killing time"), because nowadays, he says, "it's not only school that takes time" but "you're constantly building up your social network, and that's timeconsuming too". He still watches the news, however, because his mother "thinks it's good". For Carl, then, leisure is time to be used, while not necessarily consciously, for the acquisition of cultural and social capital that can be employed in the educational field and, later, in the struggle for certain social positions (he wants to be a diplomat). Hence, television as a means of killing time is not considered productive, while watching the news is believed to be of value. It is important to note, however, that the privileged males sometimes also use their leisure, especially the media, for escaping the demands of school, and that the practices interpreted here as strategies

and investments may be experienced as sheer fun.

The disprivileged too make strategic use of their leisure, but not in order to gain advantages in the educational field. Daniel, for example, uses most leisure for playing computer games[3], which seems reasonable considering his dream of making a living from e-sports, and John, who wants to be a janitor, earns some extra money by occasionally taking care of an industrial estate owned by a friend of his father. Similarly, Gökhan's frequent visits to the gym correspond to his ambition to work as a police officer or security guard. But none of these pursuits are generally convertible to symbolic capital in the field of education, and certainly not in the kind of schools and study programs which enable access to higher social positions. Hence, they are of limited use, at least in societies where educational merits are crucial, also in the struggles of the general social field.

Similarly, while the privileged males tend to interpret and use media in compliance with the demands of education, for example by stressing the importance of keeping up-to-date with public affairs, the disprivileged generally take a different stance with leisure-time media use. Daniel can serve as an example. For him television basically amounts to comedy series (e.g. *The Simpsons*; *Family Guy*). While these series are popular among the privileged too, along with news and various highbrow programs, Daniel conveys a strong dislike for news in general ("a waste of time") – especially if broadcasted by Swedish public service television ("those channels suck").

DIGITAL MEDIA AS CLASSIFIED

The young men thus engage with and ascribe different value to (mediated) cultural goods and practices as a result of their class habitus and the ways in which it organises their future aspirations and perceptions of education and leisure. However, as implied above, not all uses of leisure and (traditional) media are recognised as legitimate, i.e. function as capital, in the educational field. The same goes for the internet. The contribution of education to the institu-tion and imposition of a certain scheme of classification and valuation of digital goods and practices will now be further explicated. When asked about their perceptions of how digital goods/practices are valued in society at large, the informants painted a rather consistent picture in which the dominant morality of digital media can be glimpsed (Table 3).

Using digital media for educational, social and civic purposes is seen as valuable and desirable, while playing computer games, watching porn, gambling, etc. is deemed as immoral. However, it is also a matter of *how* you engage with digital media. This should be done moderately and in accordance with a well-established standard not only stating that production is better than consumption, but also advocating an ideology of professionalism (see Carpentier, 2010). Hence, agents must be productive *and* professional when using digital media, at least if they are to use them in the social and symbolic struggles over capital, but at the same time, this strategy is inherently linked to the risk of being depreciated as amateurish when making public your digital creations. Thus, the dominant classification/valuation of digital goods and practices easily transmutes into a classification/valuation of agents. Simon, for instance, reckons civic internet uses to be socially valued and defined as distinctively highbrow, i.e. restricted to the "posh people" as he sarcastically calls those who make use of "news sites" and sites "where you're supposed to give your opinion or say what you think about politicians and shit like that". Similarly, Ian figures that "someone sitting and writing these digital codes and playing World of Warcraft" is generally looked down upon and thought of as "a bit nerdy", just as someone who "can't check his e-mail" becomes classified as "a weird dude as well".

The digital good	The digital bad
Educational uses (i.e. the internet as library and news provider)	Excessive use (risking the non-digital good, e.g. school work, friends, outdoor activities)
Social uses (i.e. the internet as a means of social networking)	Playing computer games
Civic uses (i.e. the internet as a forum for debate)	Online gambling
Production of digital content	File sharing
Professionalism	Unacceptable content (e.g. pornography, extremist propaganda, drug recipes)
	Mere consumption of digital content
	Amateurism

Table 3: *The moral order of digital goods/practices as perceived by the informants.*

Hence, the young men recognise that not all digital goods and practices are recognised as legitimate, i.e. convertible to symbolic capital in the general social field. In order for digital media to become effective weapons in its ongoing struggles, they must be used in compliance with the rules of the game as defined by for example the educational system; that is, reasonably—both in the sense of *not too much* (i.e. not jeopardising more valuable activities) and in the sense of *for the proper reasons* (i.e. educational, social and civic) —but also actively, productively and professionally. The question is how the dominant morality undergirding these rules of the game might serve to (dis)privilege the (dis)privileged, who are unequally equipped in terms of legitimate cultural capital due to their natal class. This will be addressed below by considering the young men's interpretations and uses of digital media in relation to the perceived moral order of digital goods/practices.

DIGITAL MEDIA AS CLASSIFYING

All young men, regardless of class, have more or less positive feelings about the internet. The reasons for these feelings, however, seem to not only be different, but also distinctive of their class habitus. While the privileged males value the internet as a resource for learning, social networking, (civic) participation and amusement, thus perceiving it largely in compliance with the norms and values of school, the disprivileged tend to position digital media as oppositional to education, mainly valuing their capacity to entertain. This is not to say that the privileged never play computer games or that the disprivileged never access news online, only that there are differences in how digital media are *interpreted*. But these interpretations also tend to shape how they are *used*. There are subjective and objective differences between occasionally having a look at the top news at MSN and regularly visiting various online newspapers, just as gaming several hours per day is different from playing a couple of times per week.

Although several of the disprivileged males point to easy access to information as an upside of the internet, they generally refer to it as a resource either for the mundane activities of everyday life (e.g. looking at timetables) or for their (depreciated) interest in computer games (e.g. keeping track of forthcoming game releases). Occasionally, it is talked about as useful for doing school assignments too, but not only do the privileged males stress this good more explicitly – some also use it as part of a spontaneous learning process, pretty much in line with their formal education:

> Neil: If I'm bored, really bored, I might... like, if I don't feel like watching anything on YouTube or if I can't come up with something to search for at Google, I usually go to Wikipedia and just sort of browse through a random article. Just for fun really, hehe. [...] I have always considered myself quite well-read, and I think of it as... I think it's rather... learning gives me pleasure, so to speak. And I can get that from Wikipedia. [...] Because I'm very thirsty for knowledge and I want to understand why things are the way they are and... like why... why did the King of Portugal stop Columbus from travelling? Such things.

The perceived benefits of the internet extend to the opportunities for social networking as well. First, however, it is worth noting that not everyone engages with social networking sites (e.g. Facebook). Daniel, for example, cannot see the point of it ("I don't get it!") and phones his friends to get in touch – "the traditional way", as he says. Neither does he use MSN Messenger – not anymore, because "it's so annoying when it pops up while you're gaming". It is not only the disprivileged, however, who stay away from social networking sites. Neil uses several digital means of socialising, but has not yet signed up for Facebook. Still, he differs from the disprivileged in talking about his non-membership as a strategy of distinction.

Neil also typifies a key difference between the privileged and disprivileged males' ap-proach to social networking. While the latter perceive it mainly as a pastime, the former also recognise its productive sides. When Neil has "nothing better to do", he goes chatting with people from abroad – a practice to which he ascribes the potential of improving his "understanding for how different people and religions can look at things differently". This can be seen as an investment of time in the acquisition of cosmopolitan capital (Weenink, 2008), and for Neil, who aspires to higher education and a journalistic career, it might pay off.

The privileged males' accounts also lay bare how the use of social networking sites is not only a matter of the joy of socialising, but also of preserving, increasing and displaying one's social and symbolic capital. Some of them speak about Facebook as if it were a game of honour. For instance, the number of friends cannot be too small, but it cannot be too big either, since this is perceived as a misconception of the meaning of being friends – as something limitless or tasteless, quite in the same way as the conspicuous consumption of the nouveaux riche is depreciated as vulgar. By and large, the privileged tend to take the intricate rules of Facebooking more seriously than do the users among the disprivileged, judging from their detailed elaborations on these rules of the game and their general preoccupation with the appropriate appearance and behaviour of self and others at the website.

If the privileged rather than the disprivileged recognise and invest time and effort in digital practices that are socially valued and thus can be converted to symbolic capital in the field of education and the general social field, what seems to be distinctive of the digital media use of the latter group is computer games. While the privileged males play moderately, mostly as part of a social activity not reducible to the gaming itself, the disprivileged clearly put the gaming *per se* in the centre. They take computer games seriously and invest time, money and effort not only in various modes of gaming, but also in a range of associated goods and practices (e.g. game-related discussion threads, game videos uploaded to YouTube).

Moreover, their interest in games shapes their uses of other digital goods. For in-

stance, some of them give as an important reason for using Facebook the games connected to the website. Thus, among the disprivileged males engaging with digital means of social network-ing, there seems to be a translatory tendency related to the depreciated practice of gaming, such that the potential benefits of these means might not be realised. Similarly, they visit online forums not to discuss, but to find solutions to game-related problems.

Robert is the only one of the privileged males who expresses an explicit interest in com-puter games, but while Daniel and Simon consider a career related to their hobby, he wants to be a journalist. Although he appreciates computer games, Robert thus conveys an awareness of this being an interest he cannot prioritise over for example school-related activities. Rather than building his future aspirations around gaming, Robert tries to capit-alise on his hobby to find a way into the journalistic field. At the time of the interview, he had recently applied to write about Playstation 3 at a website, where he had long been an active forum participant.

Similarly, Ian blogs in order to develop his writing outside of formal education, while Neil, who is interested in poetry, publishes his poems on a website where he can get feedback – both practices being strategic considering their dream of making a living from their writing. The potential for using the internet for the production and publication of di-gital content is more thoroughly realised by the privileged—a tendency exemplified by how Robert actively participates in game-related discussions, while Daniel, though he takes games far more seriously, never writes anything in such forums. Discussing games will not necessarily help you to master them practically, but perhaps it will make you a better writer. Thus, it may be of use *vis-à-vis* the journalistic field, but hardly if you want to make it in e-sports.

CONCLUSION

The present article suggests that social class, through the workings of habitus, tends to shape how young men look at their education, leisure and future, which, in turn, produce different interpretations and uses of digital media. The privileged males are dedicated to their education and perceive their future attendance at university more or less as a matter of course. This produces a certain approach to leisure, constituted around the idea of spare time as a scarce resource to be strategically invested in (digital) goods and practices with the capacity to generate profit in the field of education and the general social field. In this fash-ion, they tend to read digital media in compliance with the perceived scheme of classifica-tion and valuation of digital goods and practices as instituted and imposed through, for example, the educational system. For instance, they highlight the internet as a resource for learning, networking and the production/distribution of digital content. And when enga-ging in digital goods/practices outside what is considered productive leisure (e.g. computer games), they do so to a moderate extent.

The disprivileged males, conversely, consider school to be boring and perceive high-er education either as out of the question or as a distant possibility not really meant for them, depending on whether they aspire to lower-class occupations, to professions beyond their class, or to careers related to their hobby. They also make strategic use of their leisure, but because they tend to take school less seriously, their investments are seldom made in goods and practices convertible to symbolic capital in the field of education and the struggles of the social field. This is manifested in their tendency to think of digital media as oppositional to education, so that when not engaging in socially depreciated practices – e.g. playing computer games (which most do a lot) – they use the digital good, too, for the pur-pose of mere amusement, thereby failing to realise the potential profits hidden in seemingly

banal digital practices, such as information seeking, social networking or online discussions.

Hence, while they do recognise the dominant scheme of classification and valuation of digital goods and practices, the disprivileged tend to use digital media in ways that are at odds with it. They recognise the moral order of digital goods and practices, but disregard it in practice. On the face of it, thus, something paradoxical is observed here, insofar as the disprivileged ought to know that their readings of digital media serve to reproduce their disprivilege.

In sharp contrast to voluntaristic explanations, Bourdieu (1989) tries to solve this paradox by claiming that agents, being born into an already ordered social reality, tend to incorporate this very order in their habitus, thereby taking for granted not only their own position in it, but also that of others. To the extent that agents (dis)privileged by this order misrecognise the true source of their own (dis)privilege—i.e. the unequal distribution of the forms of capital – one can speak of a symbolic violence. Thus, when the disprivileged males recognise the different value given to digital goods and practices, they simultaneously perform an act of misrecognition, insofar as they take for granted the rules of the game, i.e. the dominant classification/valuation of digital media, rather than perceiving them as a matter of symbolic power, which – precisely therefore – serves to reproduce their disprivileged position (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The class reproduction remains hidden and so it remains – not through brutality or persuasion, but simply through "the order of things" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 168). This force of "the order of things" – embodied in the class-distinctive habituses of the (dis)privileged males and habitually realised through their actions – thus appears to apply also to the supposedly disorderedly, fluid digital media, to which is sometimes ascribed the potential of bringing to an end the enduring inequalities of class. The results presented here suggest that digital media are appropriated in ways that rather serve to reproduce such inequalities. Hence, the assumed democratising potentials of digital media seem to be unequally realised – even within the so-called digital generation.

ENDNOTES

1   In this article, the term *digital media* refers to personal computers, the internet, and/or the various forms of goods and practices which they enable.

2   The data were gathered through the first round of fieldwork of my ongoing PhD project. In the Swedish school system, upper secondary school (3 years, elective) is preceded by elementary school (9 years, compulsory). Though elective, almost all young Swedes today attend upper secondary school, normally at the age of 16. Some study programs are preparatory for higher education, others are vocationally-oriented.

3   In this article, the term *computer games* refers to the genres the informants engaged with, i.e. action, adventure, war, strategy and sports.

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Planning an academic career: A report on a YECREA panel at the Third European Communication Conference, Hamburg, 2010

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Ambitions, uncertainties, decisions

In this brief essay, we review insights from a European experience exchange panel which brought together scholars from diverse epistemological, intellectual and regional locations to reflect on their careers. It was with two contrasting questions in mind that we set out to organise an experience exchange panel: on the one hand we asked ourselves, how best can an academic career be planned? That is, how do we seek out the right opportunities? How do we prepare ourselves for unexpected moves, and how, if at all, do we prepare for intellectual changes of direction? What counts as important in building an academic CV? On the other hand, we were perplexed by the range of stories around us about successful careers being founded on chance meetings, impulsive ideas and unanticipated dilemmas. How then, can a career be planned at all? It was with these two opposing views in mind that we set out on this task of bringing together scholars at diverse points in their careers to focus on three themes, as they spoke to a new generation of researchers. We focused on (1) aspects of planning; (2) decisions involved in mobility; and (3) dilemmas in the early days of an emergent career. In selecting these themes, we knew we would open up a European network of experiences, where 'what counts' and 'what plans are the best', would soon become relative questions. And this all, doubtless, in the context of intense competition, financial uncertainties and a changing field of media and communication research which throws up newer interdisciplinarities every day.

We intended this session to open up a dialogic space rather than a lecture space, and to identify questions of importance and uncertainties of significance rather than distribute fixed answers waiting to be handed out. The session was attended by about one hundred young scholars and academics, with nine speakers sharing insights from across Europe.

Speakers were Nico Carpentier (Belgium), Uwe Hasebrink (Germany), Saila Poutiainen (Finland), Nuria Simelio (Spain), Michele Sorice (Italy), Roberto Suarez (Germany), Tomáš Trampota (Czech Republic), Elena Vartanova (Russian Federation) and Tamara Witschge (UK). The high attendance and subsequent positive feedback draws attention to the fact that the workshop fulfilled a need, one that is in keeping with ECREA missions of cross-cultural exchanges as well as YECREA ambitions of better supporting emergent scholars at various stages in their doctoral work. In what follows we recap central insights from what was said on the day, following our three key themes of planning, mobility and early career dilemmas.

<div align="center">

PLANNING

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In our first theme we asked scholars about their personal encounters with planned careers. **Uwe Hasebrink** reminded us that while careers cannot be planned to their last details, in reality, they do, however, need to be planned from the outset as careers cannot be left to accident. The guiding principle, however, must not be an instrumental one as Hasebrink stressed, but rather a question of following one's passions and identifying what one's core research strengths and interests are. He reminded us also of a persistent division between theoretically bent researchers and empirically inclined ones, and between qualitative strengths and quantitative ones. While these binaries are meant to be transcended, they are often indicators of what one is good at. So, for instance, a survey researcher who has spent many years designing, administering and analysing surveys in media and communication research has a demonstrable strength in quantitative methodologies, as an experienced interviewer or observer has in qualitative methods. These strengths are, as Hasebrink noted, crucial to highlight and exploit in the job-seeking process. This passion for one's key strengths, according to Hasebrink, has a way of making itself evident in a CV, something distinctly different from the strategically placed, and perhaps more instrumental, 'evidence' of quality found in tailor-made and professionalised cover letters which are often treated with scepticism. Also, it is important to remember that one's interests in the field of media and communication are not necessarily always evidenced by an endless list of publications but, rather, a well-rounded academic experience spanning projects, networks, publications, and conferences among other things. For **Nico Carpentier**, too, it was a question of pursuing one's own talents but being realistic throughout. Carpentier reminded us that not everyone will have equally successful careers, as competition is intense. However, it is indeed possible to have successful careers which are built on accurate identification of strengths and talents and, most importantly, evidence of activity. Far from getting lost in the details of one's thesis topic, the real agenda should be, in the words of both Hasebrink and Carpentier, to be active, develop well-rounded networks, publish and put one's work out there. **Tamara Witschge** stressed similar points about developing active research profiles with a word of caution – one's agenda behind networking must necessarily stem from intellectual passion rather than overtly instrumental goals, for these make themselves apparent in interpersonal interactions and ultimately do not further the task of networking. Witschge spoke of how organising a conference and designing its intellectual narrative had provided her an excellent intellectual experience that later turned out to be transformative, for without passion – something Hasebrink and Carpentier stressed many times – she notes, confidence too is absent. And this is all linked to endless frustrations, as **Tomáš Trampota** noted, for applications follow countless rounds of disappointments even when one has done everything right. The key then, beyond passion, commitment and a diverse research profile, is perseverance. The striking concurrence amongst the speakers on planning was not simply that all stressed to varying extents the unplanned nature of their careers but that all outlined how a strong commitment to key research interests and to diversification of activities as a young scholar are central to successful careers.

MOBILITY

For young scholars, moving across borders for early career positions poses a lot of opportunities but also potential challenges, as application practices may differ in different national contexts. **Roberto Suarez** stressed the importance of building a cross-European network and of being ambitious and, most of all, persistent – to 'fight for it', as he put it. Suarez relocated to Germany from Spain on one of the EU's Marie Curie postdoctoral scholarships. Using his experiences of applying for his Marie Curie postdoctoral fellowship as an example, Suarez told us of how he applied twice for the fellowship and was rejected twice. After receiving his second rejection, Suarez contested the decision formally and was successful in reversing the decision. Before starting the application process, Suarez was proactive and initiated contact with established academics at different European universities, testifying to the importance of not giving up when we face obstacles and rejections. He also told us that the ECREA Summer School had provided an important source of contacts for potential host institutions. **Saila Poutiainen** was also proactive in her approach. Addressing the issue of differences in application practices in Europe and the US, Poutiainen noted the emphasis on 'paper work' that characterises the US application process. Recommendation letters particularly play a major role. Applying for postgraduate positions in the late 1990s, Poutiainen described how she was reading brick-sized books on the universities she was considering prior to deciding on the University of Massachusetts. While this studious part of Poutiainen's application process was partly due to the scarcity of elaborate university websites 15 years ago, Poutiainen later learned that 'shopping around' – visiting universities and talking to professors – was considered a common practice in the US. While shopping around at universities and conferences is still very much an important part of the US application practices, Suarez's story shows that being proactive and talking to potential collaborators and employers can create opportunities on both sides of the Atlantic and across Europe.

DILEMMAS

The expectations that scholars are faced with in the early stages of their career trajectories may vary depending on the type of academic position they are applying for and where the job is based. For example, whether they are applying for positions funded by departments, universities, national research councils, the EU, pan European networks, whether it is a research based position, involves teaching responsibilities, is a tenure track position or a fixed contract position. Meeting these different expectations regarding publications, successful funding applications, teaching experience and experience from collaborative research projects creates a range of dilemmas for young scholars. Speaking of his experience in the interdisciplinary field of philosophy, reception studies, semiotics and cultural studies in Italy, **Michele Sorice** shared his experiences as a young scholar when he faced challenges of both navigating an emerging field and localistic power struggles. At the time, semiotics was new in the social sciences in Italy and subject to a lack of confidence. Instead of being dissuaded, Sorice saw this as an opportunity to carve out a unique position for himself as a researcher. Today, he encourages his students similarly to position themselves in relation to strategic research fields by creating a 'unique mix' of research interests and competencies. Sorice noted that venturing down new avenues in this way involves taking risks, but stressed that an academic career requires you to be bold. And it is this strategic positioning that Sorice stressed as his way of circumventing the importance of belonging to what he called an academic lobby in building an academic career in Italy. From a Russian perspective, **Elena Vartanova** addressed dilemmas brought about by tensions between funded, contracted and independent research. Vartanova suggested that these tensions are accentuated by the lack of funding in academic research institutions in the field of communication, me-

dia and journalism coupled with the media industries' capacity for providing funding through contracted research. In the Soviet context of Vartanova's early career, this entailed political dilemmas – dilemmas that Vartanova argued can also be found, albeit in less explicit forms, in academia across Europe: choices between practical research that resembles propaganda versus independent, academic research. **Nuria Simelio** talked about dilemmas between evaluation systems and passion. Simelio argued that the competitiveness of performance indicators is antithetical to passion and collective efforts and interpersonal influences. Against this backdrop, trying to move ahead in academia requires privileging research over teaching. And this is difficult for young scholars, because teaching often represents a vital source of income and a way to establish a foothold in a department. It is thus a question of balancing what you want and what is viable.

Responding to questions about dilemmas of age versus experience raised in the question and answer session, Hasebrink and Carpentier argued that EU policies are bringing about a focus on speedy completion. At the same time, they both stressed the importance of being ready, of confidence and maturity, as well as a CV that demonstrates a diverse range of scholarly engagement. The latter point was also stressed by Suarez who felt that his involvement in different side projects was instrumental in getting his postdoctoral position.

PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE: OR A GAMBLER'S LIFE?

During the question and answer session, Alenka Jelen drew a parallel that passion is required to maintain perseverance and a gambler's life. Using an example from gambling research[1], Alenka Jelen pointed to similarities in the ways in which academics and gamblers enjoy the constant challenge: academics resemble gamblers in their commitment to their vocation which is often so strong that it is detrimental to their mental health and family relations. Moreover, both pursue financially insecure career paths that can benefit from strategic planning but which, crucially, also involve an element of luck, and can be characterised by emotional highs and lows. Finally, both types of career path are structured around self-management. This ties in with the two overarching themes that emerged from the experiences shared by speakers in their presentations: passion and perseverance. Across countries, scholarly generations and sub-disciplines, speakers emphasised the importance of perseverance. For example, both Nico Carpentier and Roberto Suarez advised young scholars not to give up and not to be discouraged by rejections. Dovetailing on this, Tomáš Trampota warned that applications are often rejected even when we have submitted proficient project proposals and built a promising CV, calling for diligence and not taking disappointments as defeats. Here, Tamara Witschge argued for the need for academic careers to be grounded in passion, because passion is ultimately what will help foster the perseverance that is required to prosper in academia. Elena Vartanova reiterated this relationship between passion and perseverance, arguing that commitment to influence how the world is understood helps balance challenges of the isolation of writing, low salaries, making ends meet and work overload that characterise academic careers in media and communication (and gambling).

NOTES ON SPEAKERS

Nico Carpentier is Senior Lecturer at the Social Sciences department of the University of Loughborough. He is also vice-president of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

Uwe Hasebrink (born 1958) is Director of the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research and Professor for Empirical Communication Research at the University of Hamburg.

Saila Poutiainen (Ph.D. in Communication, University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA) is tenured university lecturer and the head of the unit of Speech Communication in the Institute of Behavioural Sciences (former Department of Speech Sciences) at the University of Helsinki, Finland.

Núria Simelio, Chair of the ECREA Women's Network, is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Communication Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona. Her principal area of research is focused on gender and cultural diversity in the media.

Michele Sorice is Professor of Political Communication and Media Studies at LUISS University, Rome, where he is also director of the Centre for Media and Communication Studies.

Roberto Suárez Candel works as a Marie Curie Post-doctoral researcher at the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research in Hamburg. Since February 2010, he has been in charge of a project that analyses the redefinition and reposition of public service broadcasting in the multiplatform media scenario [www.psb-digital.eu].

Tomáš Trampota is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University; there, and at Vyšší odborná škola publicistiky, he has taught courses on Sociology of News, Media and Society, Media Content Analysis, and Analysis of Media.

Elena Vartanova is Full Professor, Dean and Chair in Media Theory and Media Economics at the Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Tamara Witschge is a lecturer at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. Tamara's main research interests are media and democracy, changes in the journalistic field, and equality and diversity in the public sphere. She is the General Secretary of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

<div align="center">ENDNOTES</div>

1   The example was taken from Pat Bazeley's book Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo.

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