

Smugggle +

Uncensored

by A. Pokrywka

SOCIAL MEDIA IS VERY OFTEN CONSIDERED AS STRAIGHTFORWARD WAY TO WEAKEN PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS, DECREASE PRODUCTIVITY OR LIMIT PRIVACY. THE SAME WAY A KNIFE CAN BE AN EASY INSTRUMENT TO MAIM, HURT AND KILL. NEVERTHELESS, THE DECISION TO CONSCIOUSLY USE A TOOL, WHETHER IT IS SOCIAL MEDIA OR A KNIFE, DEPENDS ON A PERSONAL WILL IN COMBINATION WITH A COMPLEX SET OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES: AFTER ALL A KNIFE CAN BE USED FOR CARVING WOOD, PREPARING FOOD, SHARPENING PENCILS OR STRIPPING WIRES. LIKewise SOCIAL MEDIA CAN BE USED FOR MUCH MORE CREATIVE PURPOSES THAN ONLY THOSE PASSIVELY ACCEPTED BY CUSTOMARY PRACTICES. IT'S ALL NOT ABOUT MISUSING THOUGH. "MISUSE" IS WHAT THE CULTURE TELLS IT IS, AFTER IT HAS SET THE "PROPER" CONVENTIONS, WHICH ARE BOTH USEFUL (BY EASING UP THE INTERACTION) AND RESTRICTING (BY BEING PREDICTABLE AND BLIND TO THE POTENTIAL PURPOSES). IT'S MORE ABOUT DISCOVERING SOMETHING THAT WOULD FIT THE SITUATION WITHOUT SENSELESS MIMICKING OF ACTIONS KNOWN FROM ESTABLISHED SOCIAL INTERACTIONS. THIS APPROACH CONNECTED TO THE DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF TOOLS USED CAN HELP TO GOVERN PEOPLE'S LIVES BY THEIR CREATIONS IN ORDER TO REGAIN CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY. THAT'S WHY IN THE CASE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ONE SHOULD WORRY MOST ABOUT UBIQUITOUS LACK OF CREATIVITY ENHANCED BY NON-REFLECTIVE SUBORDINATION AND PASSIVITY, CONVENIENT IGNORANCE AND SUPERFICIALITY. CREATIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAN'T BE PROVEN BY ANY FACEBOOK QUIZ OR EVEN THE GUILFORD'S ALTERNATIVE USES TASK TEST. EVERYDAY LIFE IS THE BEST CREATIVITY CHECK HERE.

~ AGNIESZKA POKRYWKA

VOLATILITY, NICHEs AND HYBRIDS: THE NEW MEDIA, IN ACTION

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WHAT IS THE REVOLUTION? THE DIGITALIZATION!” – CLAIMS PROFESSOR PAOLO MANCINI. AND, YES: THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ROLE OF NEW MEDIA, THAT HAS BEEN ANALYZED BY MANY SCHOLARS AND PUBLISHERS, CHANGED OUR PERCEPTION OF INFORMATION IN THE MODERN WORLD. THIS SHIFT HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY HIGHLIGHTED DURING RESEARCH ON MASS SOCIAL PROTESTS WHICH OCCURRED IN RECENT YEARS. BUT – AS MANCINI ALSO POINTS OUT – IT IS CRUCIAL NOT TO DRIFT ON THE WAVE OF ENTHUSIASM REGARDING NEW MEDIA IN ORDER TO NOT OVERESTIMATE ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIETAL CHANGE.

INTERVIEW WITH **PAOLO MANCINI**
BY AGNIESZKA FILIPIAK & ELIZA KANIA

Some time ago the cover of “The Economist” (July, 2013) presented an image of a woman holding a smartphone with the caption EVERYWHERE linked to other groundbreaking moments in the history of Europe such as the Spring of Nations. Do you think that this visualization could be considered a symbol of a real change in the use and role of media and new media?

Also “Time” magazine, a few years ago, named the computer “Man of a year.” So it is clear that New Media – in general frames – are deeply changing our society, so of course it is a revolution. But, more precisely, what is the revolution? The digitalization! Of course the use of new media, for example during the activity of new social movements, is important but at the same time overestimated by scholars and public opinion. Probably without new media the revolutions of Arab Spring and other global events could not have taken place. I consider new media as an instrument for potential change, as a vehicle, which must be seen and used in certain context. Basically, the Arab Spring started in Tunisia due to the rising prices of bread. After that, new media became the instrument that transformed the situation. What is more specific, the Arab Spring teaches us that new media are important, but they also increase the volatility of ideas, society and activity. new media increase the speed of social and political change. I see a problem societies becoming more unstable, because of the speed of the media environment.

In the context of societal change you’ve mentioned, to what measure new media could turn into the instruments of fanaticism, totalitarianism and massive manipulation? The tools, the instruments are always available as a double-edged sword.

There are two aspects of the problem: one is manipulation, pointed out by Evgeny Morozov and called cyber-utopianism. The other aspect is social and political polarization. Most of the time new media are the space of allocation of the polarized discourse. Related with niche audiences, they reinforce the existing opinions. This process is not the way to open the public debate; on the contrary, it leads to the restriction of public debate over certain issues, as they are addressed to a very specific audience.

Is “videocracy” still a current issue? Do you still consider the television as a main source of power?

Yes, of course. But don’t forget that we live in a hybrid system in which mainstream media, such as newspapers or television, live

and work together with new media. The coverage of the television, broadcasting regularly refers to new media. More than videocracy we experience the era of the abundance, with many different – old and new – sources of information. This is the new frontier.

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WE'RE MOVING FROM MASS AUDIENCE TO NICHE AUDIENCE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME NEW MEDIA MAY ALLOW OTHER FIGURES TO TAKE THE STAGE

You wrote once that the liberal model dominated the media space. Is it valid nowadays?

I wouldn't say that anymore. If we're referring to the Western World it is still valid, but if we look beyond Western World we face a couple of different models of professional journalism. The liberal model is mixed with other routines, procedures and demands. And again a sort of hybridization comes out. Mostly, because the new media are changing the landscape. In 2004, when I wrote about the liberal model, new media were a marginal curiosity. Now, in 2014, we are strongly linked to the trends of communication indicated by this sort of media. Speaking about the liberal model we should analyze the case of the USA, the homeland of this model. The neutral journalism in USA is in danger now. For instance FOX News is performing strongly as an advocacy model of journalism. So even there the liberal model is being replaced by something else, which is impossible to name at the moment, but for sure the neutrality and fairness of media coverage is changing. It is strongly related to media abundance, many sources of information provoke the segmentation of the audience and the market. News media are addressed to niche audiences nowadays, which modify the structure of the audience.

The great era of the journalists who were able to visibly and significantly influence the political and social system has passed. Should we consider that journalism based on new media is leaderless and anonymous?

Walter Cronkite's phenomenon was possible, because there was mass audience, and because CBS was addressed to a mass audience. Nowadays it is not achievable anymore. On the other side, you can't say that new media are anonymous; they allow the development of other important, symbolic figures, but not necessary journalists. We're moving from mass audience to niche audience, but at the same time new media may allow other figures to take the stage. The new media are not anonymous by definition, for example in Italy the

figure and authority of the new political leader, Beppe Grillo,¹ was created on the basis of the web.

When it comes to the aspect of interactivity supported by social networks and Web 2.0. – is it real empowerment or only the substitute of influence?

I suppose, that on-line and off-line interactions go together, it is not replacement or substitution, we're dealing with a new, hybrid model.

Inside this hybrid model, do you consider the case of Wikileaks and its impact relevant and reflecting the positive potential of New Media?

Definitely yes! But at the same time such secrets are necessary for society. I'm against the idea that everything must be public. We need integration and some forms of control, but a reasonable measure of secrets is crucial and inevitable for society's structure and dynamism.

Paolo Mancini is a professor at the Facolta di Scienze Politiche at the Universita degli Studi di Perugia. His research interests focus on the relationship between mass communication systems and the political system, and on the study of electoral campaigns, on which he has considerable comparative research experience. His principal publications include: *Between Commodification and Lifestyle Politics. Does Silvio Berlusconi Provide a New Model of Politics for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2011), *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (with Daniel Hallin) (Cambridge, 2011), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy* (with David Swanson) (London, 1996) and many others.

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R/evolutions: Global Trends &
Regional Issues,
Volume 2, Issue 1, June 2014.
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¹ Beppe Grillo is an Italian comedian, actor, blogger and political activist. He has been involved in political activity since 2009 as founder of the Five Star Movement. He is known as the organizer of a "V-Day Celebration" which was, according to the scholars, the first case in Italian history of a demonstration promoted via blogosphere and social networking web pages and gathered more than 2 million participants. (Editor's note – AF)