Doing IT for Themselves: Management versus Autonomy in Youth E-Citizenship

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"Don't mention the war"

In most contemporary democracies, significant energy and resources are being devoted to the project of cultivating, shaping, and sustaining the next generation of citizens. While everyone agrees that promoting citizenship is "a good thing," there is rather less consensus about the preferred forms or outcomes of civic behavior. A brief example from the recent experience of citizenship education in the United Kingdom will help to illuminate this contested terrain.

Citizenship education (the British equivalent of "civics") was introduced into the English and Welsh secondary school curriculum in 2001, following the recommendations of a report produced by a Commission headed by the political theorist Bernard Crick that called for "no less than a change in the political culture of this country."[1] Unlike U.S. civic education, with its emphasis upon an "adaptative and conditioned, rather than active and critical" approach,[2] the British model of citizenship education aimed explicitly to nurture young people who would be "individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves."[3] An appendix to the Crick Report acknowledged the potential significance of digital technologies, stating that "the interactive character of the Internet provides opportunities for invigorating citizenship education."[4] The extent to which these lofty aspirations were translated into everyday pedagogies and activities was brought into sharp focus in Britain in the buildup to the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

Although the new citizenship curriculum requires schools to teach students about politically significant current events, as well as political structures and processes, a study of citizenship education teaching in English schools in the months before the invasion of Iraq found that teachers "were uneasy in dealing with the issues of Iraq or of terrorism" and "young people of all ages felt they were being sold short in terms of information and understanding."[5] The former chief inspector of schools for England endorsed this reluctance to engage school students in discussion about the war, arguing that

I worry a bit about encouraging young people to articulate judgements and feelings, however strongly they are held, when they haven't got the evidence, they haven't got the experience to really understand the full ramifications of what they are talking about.[6]

A remarkable number of school students begged to differ and in the course of February and March 2003 Britain experienced an unprecedented wave of strikes organized by school students protesting against the British Government's support for the Iraq war. Libby Brooks, reporting for the *Guardian* newspaper on the protest by over a thousand school students outside the British Parliament, observed that

These young people were organising and leading their own protests, leafleting at school gates, organising email networks and expertly working the media. Their determination to be heard was palpable.[7]

Other sections of the British press were less positive about these demonstrations of political activism by young people, accusing them of not understanding the issues, being vulnerable to manipulation by sinister political forces, and engaging in illegitimate truancy.[8] Ironically, some British newspapers blamed the citizenship curriculum for these manifestations of dissent by young people. The reality was somewhat different: as Davies notes in her study of citizenship education, most schools failed to acknowledge, analyze or respond to the war, leaving young people with a sense of mystification and inefficacy in relation to one of the most consequential political events in recent British history; while those students who did take up "new forms of involvement and action among themselves" (as recommended by Crick) "faced disciplinary proceedings and suspensions."[9]

This failure to provide a democratic response to a momentous political event raises important questions about the capacity of a government-driven curriculum to address questions of conflict that potentially challenge its own power and legitimacy. It is a failure which supports Frazer's concern that the emphasis of the promoters of citizenship education upon generalized notions of values, rights, and duties conceals an underlying antipathy toward a more agonistic conception of politics.[10] The argument that I propose to pursue in this chapter is that the silence of citizenship education teachers about Iraq and the silencing of antiwar protesters by education authorities are indicative of a more deep-rooted tension between managed and autonomous citizenship. It is the aim of this chapter both to make theoretical sense of this tension and to explore its practical ramifications in the context of policy.

Two Faces of E-Citizenship

After Italy's unification in 1860, the Italian nationalist leader and novelist, Massimo d'Azeglio, remarked that "we have made Italy, we now have to make Italians." This project was pursued by exploiting a range of information and communication technologies (ICT), from the printing press to the mass circulation of patriotic songs. Contemporary governments seeking to promote sociocultural cohesion increasingly turn to ICT to cultivate and regulate norms, routines, and rituals of citizenship. But this grand project of "making citizens" entails an inevitable tension between liberal and communitarian ends. From a liberal perspective, citizens are free agents, and just civic norms are those that do not seek to impose upon individuals' collective notions of what is good. In contrast, the communitarian perspective places greater emphasis upon the common good than upon citizens' self-determination, and therefore justifies policies intended to shape civic behavior at the expense of individual agency. Any policy by government to promote civic engagement will be vulnerable to liberal criticism that its real intention is to encourage beliefs and actions consistent with its own values and interests, while marginalizing dissenting voices.

The British government has expressed considerable enthusiasm in recent years for the idea of promoting online political engagement, declaring that "ICT provides a means by which public participation can be increased, and we hope that with an active government policy the potential benefits can be maximised." The government's policy document on e-Democracy states that

One important target group for this policy is young people. All democratic institutions have a responsibility to ensure that young people are able to play their part. Evidence suggests that young people are among those least likely to see the democratic process as relevant to them. Young people are also among those most likely to be competent in ICT.[11]

The policy of "targeting" young people so that they can "play their part" can be read either as a spur to youth activism or an attempt to manage it. Indeed, the very notion of youth e-citizenship seems to be caught between divergent strategies of management and autonomy.[12] Although these two faces of e-citizenship represent ideal types, and should perhaps be understood as opposing points on a spectrum rather than mutually exclusive positions, they differ sufficiently in their contrasting conceptions of the status of young people, the affordances of digital technologies, and the authenticity of "actually existing democracy" to provide a useful theoretical context for assessing the projects discussed in the next section.

Youth as Apprentices or Catalysts

It would seem on the face of it that defining the status of youth would not be particularly contentious. Freeland, for example, constructs youth as a "stage of life between childhood and adulthood."[13] But what are the implications of this transitional status? Advocates of managed e-citizenship regard young people as apprentice citizens who are in a process of transition from the immaturity of childhood to the self-possession of adulthood. As apprentices, youth are in a state of dependency and becoming: to use Quovrup's wry phrase, they are human becomings rather than human beings. This means that they lack the powers of independent agency associated with self-determination. Civic apprenticeship entails learning the skills required to exercise responsible judgment in a risky and complex world.

In contrast to this conception of e-citizenship as socialization, proponents of autonomous e-citizenship refuse to see themselves as apprentice citizens, arguing that, despite their limited experience or access to resources, they possess sufficiently autonomous agency to speak for themselves on agendas of their own making. Autonomous e-citizens regard youth itself as a reflexive project in which narratives of emergence, socialization, and engagement can be renegotiated by each new generation. As Beck has argued, "The "biographization" of youth means becoming active, struggling and designing one's own life."[14] In this sense, not only the objective conditions facing youth, but the subjective experience of what it means to be a young person becomes a matter for politicized discourse.

The Internet as Anarchy or Enclave

Similarly contrasting perspectives characterize the ways in which the two faces of e-citizenship regard the Internet as a space for civic engagement. Managed e-citizenship starts from the assumption that the Internet, as an anarchic realm in which unknown nodes perpetually collide, is an unsafe place for young people, not only because their social innocence might be exploited by predators but also because they are politically vulnerable to misinformation and misdirection. For the Internet to become a useful locus of socialization,

proponents of managed e-citizenship favor the establishment of safe, civilized, moderated enclaves in which youth can learn and have their say. As well as providing a safe environment in which young people can be heard and observed, a key objective of managed spaces of e-citizenship is to cultivate "responsibilized" citizens (to use Garland's term[15]) who are not only free to argue but to obey the rules of good argument; who are not only taught to be technically competent Internet users but self-regulating actors capable of surviving safely in a virtual world replete with real and imagined dangers.

It is precisely the anarchy of the Internet that appeals to autonomous e-citizens, who see it as a relatively free space in which untrammeled creativity and acephalous networks can flourish. With Bennett, they celebrate "the Internet's potential as a relatively open public sphere in which the ideas and plans of protest can be exchanged with relative ease, speed and global scope."[16]

While proponents of managed e-citizenship tend to be sanguine about the democratic characteristics of the Internet, autonomous e-citizens express concerns about "the ways in which citizenship norms, rights, obligations and practices are *encoded* in the design and structure of our increasingly digital surroundings."[17] They question what Luke has called the "hidden pedagogies of citizenship,"[18] fearing that citizenship is being molded and constrained by technological infrastructures that are designed to perpetrate a narrow, quiescent and consumerist model of civic action.

Democracy as Existing or Aspirational

From the perspective of managed e-citizenship, existing structures and processes of governance are essentially democratic, but are undermined by the failure of citizens to engage with them and of elected representatives to respond to those who do take the trouble to participate. Democracy is seen as suffering from a "deficit" that can be rectified by enhancing the voices of the public and the listening skills of politicians. Youth are regarded as a neglected social group whose political alienation from the democratic process can be addressed by making it more genuinely accountable and consultative. As the ministerial introduction to a cabinet office report entitled *Young People and Politics* puts it,

we must all take the action necessary to raise the levels of youth participation in democracy, and the numbers of young people who use their vote. If we say young people aren't interested in politics and voting, then we must strive to engage their interest. If we are to encourage them to express their opinions at the ballot box, we must listen to what young people are telling us, and then take the right action.[19]

Proponents of autonomous e-citizenship are more skeptical about the claims and limits of "actually existing democracy." Rather than engage with the established political process, they seek to generate new democratic networks that can circumvent established regimes of power. These might be compared to Bey's notion of the temporary autonomous zone, which he describes as being "like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it."[20]

The conflict between the two faces of e-citizenship is between a view of democracy as an established and reasonably just system, with which young people should be encouraged to engage, and democracy as a political as well as cultural aspiration, most likely to be realized through networks in which young people engage with one another. As ever, strategies of accessing, influencing, and reconfiguring power are at the heart of what might at first appear to be mere differences of communicative style.

Doing and Being Done For: Some Examples

Some e-citizenship projects are run for young people by adults; others are run by young people themselves. To understand this distinction, and the practical implications of managed and autonomous youth e-citizenship, six U.K.-based projects were selected for investigation. Two of the projects are government funded, one is funded by independent charitable foundations, and three do not receive any external funding. They are

- The Hansard Society's *Headsup* project (http://www.headsup.org.uk/content/), which describes itself as "a place where young people can debate political issues and current affairs. But it's not just about talking, it's about getting something done. The debates involve the U.K.'s top decision-makers from parliament and government who want to understand the views and experiences of young Britain." The project is funded by the U.K. government's Department of Constitutional Affairs.

- The English School Students' Association (ESSA) (http://www.studentvoice.co.uk/), which "aims to provide training, guidance and advice to empower students and equip them with the vital skills needed to become actively involved in the decision-making processes in their own school communities; and . . . aims to work in partnership with other organisations to bring the views of secondary school students to the attention of local and national policy-makers, as well as the media, in relation to educational issues." The project is funded by charitable foundations.

- The Northern Irish project, *Where Is My Public Servant?* (WIMPS) (http://www.wimps.org.uk/), which describes itself as being "aiming to inspire and empower young people in Northern Ireland, giving them a voice in the decisions that affect all our lives, trying to get young people talking and influencing politicians and public representatives." The project is funded by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

- The *Students Against Sweatshops* campaign (http://www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org.uk/), which is "a student organisation which fights against the bosses of sweatshops worldwide—campaigning in solidarity with the exploited workers." The project is funded by the activists who run it.

- The George Fox 6 Campaign (http://www.free-webspace.biz/GeorgeFox/), which campaigns against the criminal conviction of six students for protesting during a conference at Lancaster University intended to promote the commercialization of research. The project is funded by the activists who run it.

- Educationet (http://www.educationet.org/) is a left-of-center news resource for students that describes itself as "the number one place to discuss the issues of the day concerning students, and of course to find out all the NUS gossip." The project is funded by the activists who run it.

The study of these six projects involved extensive semistructured interviews with key actors involved in running their online operations.[21] Interviewees were encouraged to articulate the political objectives of their projects; set out their reasons for using particular technologies and applications; reflect upon the governance of their projects, with particular reference to the regulation of online behavior; and consider the implications of having an actual or potential relationship with government. A thematic summary of their responses is set out in the following four sections.

Defining Political Objectives

There is a conspicuous difference between the political objectives of funded and nonfunded projects. The former exist to connect young people with powerful institutions that might otherwise ignore them. For example, the WIMPS project, which has been remarkably imaginative and successful in stimulating youth voices to intervene in the often opaque and tribal politics of Northern Ireland, was described as being

about young people engaging with public servants, mostly elected representatives, politicians at various levels and the reason we felt that was important was because there isn't a lot of engagement between young people and politicians here. (Smyth)

Likewise, the Hansard Society's Headsup project seeks to connect young people to parliamentarians. Described as being "a debating platform where essentially young people debate directly on a key topic" (Griffiths), a key criterion for the success of the site is the willingness of MPs to participate. Indeed, Headsup's project manager was eager to point out that "in the last year . . . so that's only five debates . . . we've actually had forty-seven MPs take part . . . which is an average of about nine and a half per debate" (Griffiths). Young people are invited to vote on topics to be debated on the Headsup forum and, once a topic has been selected, the project manager sees it as his job to recruit politicians who are willing to listen and interact. This recruitment involves members of parliamentary select committees, all-party groups, and designated representatives of the main political parties. But what about unofficial voices: dissidents, the unelected, voices from excluded segments of society? The emphasis upon being heard by powerful people seems to exclude these counterconnections.

ESSA is also committed to connecting young people to power, but in their case it is educational authorities that they seek to influence:

We are working to give students between 11 and 19 a voice in education, because it was the realization that parents, teachers, governors, heads, in fact every single person in the educational sector, had a national body and had a way of having their voice heard, but the students who are the largest stakeholders didn't have such a body. (Dey)

The political objective of the funded projects seems to be to engender a form of witnessing, so that the voices of the less powerful are somehow acknowledged, respected, or even incorporated into the policy process. When asked to think about what would constitute success or failure for their projects, these interviewees were eager to return to this theme of the quality of democratic witnessing. For example, in the case of WIMPS, the battle seemed to be to drag recalcitrant politicians into a communicative relationship for which they were not fully prepared:

The average age of politicians is probably well into the 50s—and that's being generous—so what we are saying to them is you can't ignore this [the Internet], this is the way people communicate today. We did have one politician who had a meeting with the WIMPS team and was being very patronizing and saying "I don't take e-mail seriously. People should write a letter and if their grammar is not good I won't respond," but, interestingly, recently we noticed him responding to some e-mails on the site because they came from a group of young people at a special school who were complaining about education cutbacks and threats to their education, and I think he realized he couldn't afford not to respond to that. So that was really quite interesting. (Smyth)

The common claim made by interviewees was that being heard would make young people more active citizens in the future:

Research that shows if students are engaged in decision making in the schools and they feel more part of it they are more likely to do well and not want to truant, because they feel part of the system.. . . ESSA wants to engage youth in decision making with the view that if youth engage in decision making while at school they are more likely to vote as a side impact. (Dey)

Politics has disengaged from young people, not the other way around—and if we don't get that through to politicians, then I think the democratic veneer in our society is going to get thinner and thinner and people will become more skeptical about politics and politicians. (Smyth)

This attempt to rescue contemporary democracy from its own worst habits, by opening it up to hitherto neglected voices, is in stark contrast to the more pessimistic views of the political system expressed by activists within the unfunded projects:

I don't believe there is anything like a profound commitment to democratic principles within either government or wider society. I personally think one really big advance would be for people to simply stop calling the political system in which we live democratic. For example, people can say activists shouldn't use direct action, or break laws generally, because "we live in a democracy." They can't say we shouldn't do these things because "the government is responsive to demands from the public to stop arms deals, not go to war etc." because people know this simply isn't true. But with the shortcut of "democracy" they win—any further analysis and their point gets shown up for the sham it is. (Matt)

Regardless of the merits of this anarchistic argument, it is indicative of an approach to online communication that does not regard connecting to governing institutions as a valuable objective. Rather than tell government about perceived social injustice, the online campaign organizer of Students Against Sweatshops emphasized the importance of her site as a means of connecting the interests and experiences of students to those of exploited workers in other parts of the world:

There is a recognition by students that sweatshops are a Third World issue. It appeals to the students because they also have to work rubbish jobs, long hours for no pay and there has been a big movement, particularly in America, linking up sweatshop work with low pay on campus work and fighting for a living wage for workers and it's starting to take off in U.K. universities too, which we're hoping to feed into. (Buckland)

Rather than being witnessed by authority, the autonomous e-citizenship projects are seeking to encourage a collective consciousness of shared values:

We've had over two thousand people on the online petition and a lot of people contacting us.. . . Chomsky signing the petition boosted people's interest.. . . People from literally all over the world, which was really very nice; people from Asia, Australasia, and South America and so on. You can still see them online . . . all the different names, that was really inspiring. (Matt)

Both models of e-citizenship seem to regard the nature of political engagement as a form of witnessing: for managed e-citizenship this entails being witnessed by powerful elites; for autonomous e-citizenship the point is to bear witness to one another. The notion of citizens as witnesses is powerful, implying that democratic citizenship can only ever be realized through mediated communication. Such a conception is consistent with recent work by Zelizer, Peters, Ellis, and Sontag, each of whom has attempted to show how witnessing entails making the depth of original experience available to others.[22] As Ellis argues, the paradoxically distanced and involving nature of witnessing "implies a necessary relationship with what is seen."[23] An intriguing question for new media research is whether virtual communication enhances or undermines that relationship; whether the disembodied testimonies of faceless

e-citizens can be more easily dismissed as ephemeral and ethereal or whether the force of the network might engender acts of what one might call collective witnessing.

Using Digital Technologies
Unsurprisingly, the most ambitious plans to use digital technologies came from the funded projects, which could better afford to invest in innovatory experimentation. For example, WIMPS is in the process of moving from solely text-based to audio- and video-based communications between young people and Northern Irish politicians:

One of the things we're doing is putting video on to the site, so, for example, a young person might pop up and say "Have you thought about this issue that you are working on and who the best person to speak to is—is this the kind of issue you might go to your MEP with?" so that there is an interaction between the people using the site. (Smyth)

WIMPS is also setting up opportunities for young people to produce and interact with blogs and iPods. Similarly, Headsup is "running a project in which young people can send in pictures and texts via mobile phone to the Home Affairs Select Committee" (Griffiths).

Interestingly, participants in these online projects seem not to be impressed by the more extravagant gimmickry of digital technology. In the case of WIMPS, the young people involved were highly critical of the original designs for the Web site produced by an external company:

The young people kept rejecting their designs. [The Web design company] has a very young staff, not much older than the people we were working with. They kept coming up with these sites flashy with bells and whistles on them which they thought would appeal to teenagers and we rejected about four different designs and one of the directors rang me up and said "We can't keep producing designs, time is money," so we sat the group down and talked it through and we realized was that they were trying to tell the designers was that they wanted something serious. They wanted the site to look serious. (Smyth)

Preconceived notions of "what kids want" are more than likely to be mistaken. The autonomous e-citizenship sites were equally unimpressed by digital gimmicks. Indeed, they seemed to subscribe to a fairly old-fashioned, broadcast model of how to use the Internet. For Students Against Sweatshops, the main function of the online project is to disseminate information:

It's an excellent way of getting information out to lots of people. We don't have loads of money. We can't afford to produce a newsletter that we send out to everyone. We can do it online basically for free and it can be updated instantly. People from all over the world can search for it. We get a lot of people. It's just really useful. (Buckland)

Similarly, the George Fox 6 Campaign saw their Web site as "just another resource," like putting up posters or handing out leaflets. Interviewees from the autonomous e-citizenship projects were very clear about the ways in which digital technologies has enabled them to compete in a fairer communication environment.

I think that activists like ourselves are playing on a remarkably unlevel playing field. I think the Internet gives us something. It's a positive thing. It gives you access to people that previously you wouldn't have contacted except through photocopied leaflets. You can be there in people's homes and they are on the computer and they can go to the Guardian Web site or Home Office Web site or they can go to our Web site, and in that sense we're on a slightly more even footing. (Matt)

The only way ESSA got where it has today is because of online communication. I wouldn't be able to get the word out there. Everything has happened via e-mails and newsgroups. (Dey)

Nonetheless, there was a recognition by most of the online activists that successful political relationships cannot be entirely virtual. As one interviewee put it, "I think technology is really effective where people already have a relationship and then they use the technology to enhance the relationship" (Smyth).

For the autonomous e-citizenship projects, it is the capacity to move from virtual communication to more tangible networks that held out the most alluring prospects:

If you look at the kind of activism that I'm involved in, it [digital communication] has been really beneficial for the people who have been involved because they can connect more easily and they can network within themselves more easily, which is definitely very useful . . . so I think definitely, for people who want to work in those ways, it can be helpful. (Matt)

I think social networks are really interesting. We've seen sites like Bebo or Facebook and MySpace becoming really popular amongst young people. So people do engage in these Web sites, but the question is, will they continue doing so in a political arena? (Dey)

For the editor of Educationet, the most useful function of his site is to facilitate journalistic networking, with him "digging up the raw material for other people to use" and "the people who are running student campaigns getting their information from Educationet" (Jayanetti).

Regulating Discourse

Interviewees from the managed e-citizenship projects communicated a strong sense that there is a particular way to talk about politics. Characteristics such as politeness, consensus-seeking, due respect for authority and rationality are encouraged. The manager of the Headsup project described participants in his forum as "very quick-tempered," but "in a constructive way, not ranting" (Griffiths). The manager of the WIMPS project was eager to explain that

Speaking publicly has a different implication to speaking privately. I think the young people have really learned that when they are putting stuff on the site—and this will be even more apparent when they are doing audio and video—they are speaking publicly and therefore they must use language that's appropriate. (Smyth)

This notion of appropriate speech was intriguing because of its echoes of Foucauldian notions of governmentality. According to Foucault, modern liberal governance is no longer based principally upon technologies of domination and coercion, but is increasingly concerned to cultivate habits of self-regulation, through which governable subjects are produced. The modification of talk about power among young people who are encountering politics for the first time provides an excellent illustration of this governmentalist process at work. There are three ways in which such regulation could be discerned. First, interviewees tended to subscribe to a risk discourse that emphasized the potential dangers of unrestricted online communication. Asked whether contributors to the Headsup debates could contact one another (perhaps to pursue a political argument or even to organize together on the basis of agreement), the project manager explained that

It's all done via the Web site really. They could always contact me and I'd act as a contact. But its quite tricky because of the data protection issues. You can't just pass people's identities very easily. You need to be very careful about that. (Griffiths)

While it is indeed the case that European data protection law is strict about the prevention of third-party distribution of personal information, that still does not explain why young people should not be able to contact one another directly, in the way that they surely can in the physical world.

Second, the need for debate between young people to be moderated by a supervisory presence was considered important:

In the initial stage it wasn't premoderated, which means that all the comments went on straight away. We quickly realized that the young people were very quick to cotton on to that and expose and exploit it and post lots of dodgy messages, so it's now premoderated, but the messages are of a really high quality now. (Griffiths)

The notion of "message quality" seems on the surface to be straightforward. One assumes it relates to messages that are reflective, evidential and tolerant. But these criteria are only ever implicit within the project. Nowhere on the Headsup Web site is quality either demanded or defined. What constitutes a "dodgy" message? (*Dodgy* is a British term, often used to describe improper or illicit activity.) In what ways, and with what intent, were young people "exploiting" opportunities to express themselves in inappropriate ways? There are too many unstated assumptions at play here to leave one sure that moderating techniques are politically neutral or inoffensive.

The third aspect of discourse regulation was encapsulated by official rules posted on some of the sites. The manager of the Headsup project was very candid about this:

I think with any online forum debate you need rules to help govern the participants really.. . . The thing is when you've got the rules it's easier to manage.. . . In my time of managing Heads-Up, which is about nine months now, I haven't had to refer or use any of them or say you've broken this rule etc. It's like a polite deterrent really. (Griffiths)

Again, this begs a question (which could perhaps have been pursued more energetically in the interview): what exactly are these rules deterring? The "obvious" answer associates youth with dangers of playful disruption, boundary testing, and irresponsibility. But what seems obvious is often no more than hegemonic prejudice. Sometimes deterrents never have to be used because they are not in reality deterring anything, but simply exist to reinforce institutional fear and authority. ESSA also favors guidelines for the peer discussions that it hopes to add as a key feature of its site:

I think we'd have guidelines as to what we would or would not accept. I don't think it would be very good if it became a ground for students to slag off each other or their teachers. That might not be very constructive and that might not be good for the site in general, so there would be guidelines about that. (Dey)

Each of these regulatory techniques raise questions about whose interests they are serving. Do they exist to maximize the benefits of democratic debate, or to promote a particular set of ethical principles, or to satisfy risk-aversive funders? And if there is a convincing democratic rationale for regulation, should this not be passed on to the autonomous e-citizenship projects that appear to have no guidelines regarding appropriate speech?

The Students Against Sweatshops campaign explained how they used technology to democratize decision making about appropriate content for their site:

We've got an e-mail list and sometimes before putting things up that might be contentious . . . we put them out on our open e-mail list and say, "Is this okay? What do people think about it?" So we've got shared editorial control over it. (Buckland)

The autonomous e-citizenship projects regarded the use of open-source software as an important principle of collaborative networking.

Relations With Government

Several interviewees expressed strong doubts about the British Government's genuine commitment to communicating with young people. As the editor of Educationet put it,

If the government wants more young people to be politically engaged, it should spend slightly less of its time carrying out policies that put not only young people, but pretty much all people, off having anything to do with politics and the political process. When the politicians say in their manifesto they will not introduce university tuition fees in the lifetime of the next parliament and then they go ahead and introduce tuition fees in the lifetime of the next parliament, the likelihood of people engaging positively in the way that *they want them to*, in terms of being good little citizens and voting and not making too much of a fuss about anything, that's not going to happen. What instead happens is people don't vote or they vote en-bloc in protest. People either disengage from the process or they get angry. (Jayanetti)

The WIMPS project manager was unconvinced by the listening postures of government:

Every government department is creating policies which they are supposed to consult with people on and they are sending out this gobbledegook that they want the youth workers to communicate to young people and then give feedback to the government departments. It was all on the terms of the department. It was mostly fairly uninteresting stuff to most people, let alone young people. But when young people even bothered to respond, at best they were invited to meet the Minister and shake his hand, but they were never really taken very seriously. (Smyth)

Nonetheless, government is a potential source of funding for projects that could help to realize democratic objectives that might not receive support from elsewhere. Headsup is funded by the Department of Constitutional Affairs, in return for which it is required to run at least one online debate on a topic selected by the DCA. WIMPS is funded by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. To what extent are these projects constrained by government values? According to the WIMPS project manager,

The test will come when it [WIMPS] starts to raise issues that are really quite controversial and somebody in the government or electoral unit get a phone call saying, "Why you supporting this?" We need to be strong and robust enough to be able to stand up to them, providing what the team has done is legitimate and fair. So it needs to have journalistic independence. It's quite a tricky thing to establish the funding base that allows you do that. (Smyth)

ESSA, which has already received a good deal of moral support from people close to government, would consider accepting official funding subject to one condition:

If they could give us money with no strings attached, that would be ideal, but obviously we don't want to become a mouthpiece for the government. We want to do our own thing. If they see the value in what we were doing and gave us funding, that would be good. (Dey)

Other interviewees were more doubtful about the possibility of taking government money and being allowed to criticize its actions. Asked whether they would accept money if it came out of a government fund to encourage youth e-participation, the online organizer of Students Against Sweatshops explained that

I'm not sure that for our campaign we would accept that sort of funding. I think if it's a political campaign, regardless if you use the Internet or not, there's always the question of how much you can

be influenced by taking money of that sort. Ours isn't just a campaign to get people engaged. There's a set of political objectives there. I guess we'd never come under the criteria for that. (Buckland)

The George Fox 6 Campaign was equally skeptical:

The strings that are attached, the stress that comes attached, the feeling of dependency that is created, the feeling that you can start to self-censor—it's a massive issue that once you've got money you start to think, "Am I going to piss these people off if we don't give them exactly what they want?" (Matt)

For WIMPS, the best way for government to avoid being seen as inauthentic and disingenuous in its commitment to e-participation is to support grassroots projects that are run by and accountable to young people:

The government coming out and saying we want young people to participate will probably put off significant numbers of the very young people that they want to reach. I think the success of WIMPS, to the extent that it's been successful so far, is that it's not a government site. It may have government funding, but it's most definitely not a government site. It's run by young people and I think young people coming on to it very quickly get a sense of that. (Smyth)

The editor of Educationet is less convinced by the British Government's recent enthusiasm for e-participation:

There hasn't been a fall in voter turnout because there aren't enough Web sites encouraging young people to get politically active.. . . We're coming from a period where there was no Internet. I don't vote because the parties are rubbish. I personally feel that they are going to go to Parliament to lie their backsides off—and that's based on experience. (Jayanee)

The relationship between government and the projects considered here seems to be problematic on two levels. From a pragmatic perspective, project organizers have to decide whether they can trust the government to support the principle of political engagement without seeking to manage it in practice. From a more overtly political perspective, there is the question of whether government is the provider of solutions or the cause of problems in relation to the atrophy of democratic engagement. If, as some of the interviewees argued, it is the performance—perhaps even the most basic institutional values—of governments (of various types and colors) that cause young people to turn away from politics, one might conclude that a more constructive role for them would be to provide resources for grassroots activists to use without political interference.

Supporting Youth E-Citizenship: Some Policy Proposals

The purpose of policy is to connect effective means to desired ends. Before arriving at strategic conclusions, there remains a need for clarity about the broader political objectives of youth e-citizenship. What exactly is it that the projects we have examined, and many others like them, are seeking to accomplish? As we have already seen, e-citizenship projects tend to fall into two categories. Those that have received external funding, from government bodies or charitable foundations, tend to be mainly interested in establishing "connections" between young people and institutions which have some power over their lives. Regarding youth as apprentice citizens who need to learn appropriate ways of engaging with encrusted structures of governance, they seek to promote habits of civility, while at the same time encouraging young people to think of themselves as empowered social actors whose (virtual) voices deserve to be heard. Autonomous e-citizenship projects tend not to be funded by government,

and express strong reservations about having too close a relationship with the state. These projects are less interested in engaging with powerful institutions than in forming powerful networks of young people, engaged with one another to resist the power of institutions. Regarding youth as independent political agents, autonomous e-citizens expect less from the communicative potential of having their say; for them, empowerment entails an intimate relationship between voice and action.

Both of these approaches are open to critique. Managed e-citizenship can be criticized for promoting mainly vertical and bilateral communicative relationships between young people and power elites; for failing (often on spurious grounds of "risk") to facilitate horizontal networks in which young people cannot merely express themselves as individuals, but enter into collective activities; for circumscribing agendas of political debate, such as the neurotic avoidance of "sensitive issues" or any acknowledgement that most political debate is in reality of a partisan nature; and for placing too much emphasis upon talk and being heard and showing too little concern for the consequences of democratic expression and the capacity of organized opinion to influence political outcomes. Indeed, some might argue that managed e-citizenship, with its overriding interest in friendliness, deliberation and consensus, provides young people with a highly distorted simulation of the political world: a virtual community of well-trained democrats who would be lost in any real political party, trade union, or local council.

Critics of autonomous e-citizenship might point to its dislocation from structures and processes of effective power; its tendency to preach to the converted and to pay little attention to reaching opposed minds or entering into any kind of deliberative debate with the undecided; its emphasis upon single issues, at the expense of more generalized values or aggregated positions; and its reliance upon digital technologies that are encoded in ways that are bound to undermine its efforts.

I do not propose to conclude by subscribing to one or the other of these two approaches to e-citizenship. Rather than perpetuate this dichotomy, I intend to argue that there is a strong case for breaching this divide and seeking a productive convergence between these two models of youth e-citizenship. But before turning to such a creative policy synthesis, there is a little more theoretical work to be done, for, although we have distinguished the characteristics of managed and autonomous e-citizenship, we have yet to arrive at a satisfactory answer to the question, What is e-citizenship supposed to accomplish?

Following Foucauldian political theorists, such as Rose, Barry, and Cruickshank,[24] I want to characterize e-citizenship as a technology of governance. That is not to say that e-citizenship is about governing young people, in the traditionally coercive and dominating sense, but that it is about nurturing forms of conduct consistent with being a citizen. The function of e-citizenship is to conceive, create and sustain members of a political community. The emphasis upon membership is important, because, as citizens, young people are being invited into a community; they are being offered membership cards (IDs, passports); they are required to accept both rules and sanctions (law, morality; fines and prisons); they are urged to consider their responsibilities as well as rights as members; and they are expected to have regard for the specific nature of their community (Northern Ireland versus Ireland; Canada versus the U.S.A.; Iran versus Iraq). Members of a police force, an army, a football team or a dance troupe are expected to be trained. So are citizens. To be a nonmember of a community is to be a stranger, faced with all the risks and vulnerabilities of the outsider. But to be an insider carries with it sometimes onerous burdens. It is to prepare young people for these rites and rights of membership that e-citizenship, as one technology among others, is employed.

But the terms of citizenship are not static. A second function of e-citizenship is to contest those terms. Some of the projects examined above manifested a largely uncritical view of what it means to be a citizen in a contemporary liberal democracy, such as the United Kingdom. They operated on the basis that parliament represents the people; that voting is a key way of holding power to account; that the expression of public opinion is a key means of influencing policy; that the discussion of politics is best undertaken without the interference of partisan or class loyalties; that civil behavior entails particular norms and that uncivil behavior should be regulated. These assumptions reflect the values to be found in most textbooks on citizenship education. They do not emerge out of a sinister conspiracy to maintain the status quo, but neither to they encourage young people to think for themselves about the kind of democracy they want, at least until they have been socialized into the basic routines of the existing format. Other projects examined above tended to stretch the notion of citizenship beyond its textbook definition. For example, the George Fox 6 Campaign insisted that broadly conceived rights to protest against injustice should be protected for all members of any community; Students Against Sweatshops seek to extend rights of citizenship in two ways: by adding an economic dimension to them and by calling for such rights to be granted to "strangers" in the Third World whose exploitation is in some sense linked to that of students in the West.

Technologies of e-citizenship turn cyberspace into a locus for the contestation of claims about citizenship. Because entry into the virtual public sphere is cheaper and less burdensome than making one's presence felt in the conventional public sphere, it is particularly attractive to young people whose experiences and aspirations might otherwise be marginalized or forgotten. The inclusion of these voices and traditions in the development of e-citizenship is of the utmost importance, if there is a genuine commitment to cultivate a democratic culture of participation. This is the key policy question for governments: are they in favor of merely promoting participation on their own terms or are they prepared to commit to a policy of *democratic* participation? The latter will always be slightly uncomfortable for governments. Democracy should be disruptive to people in power. Why else would it be so cherished by the relatively powerless?

How, then, might a productive convergence between managed and autonomous e-citizenship be realized? The first stage entails combining in one policy the strongest democratic features of both models. A government wishing to promote democratic youth e-citizenship might start out, therefore, by signing up to the following six principles:

1   Government is willing to fund, but not directly manage or interfere with, common online spaces in which young people are free to express themselves as citizens, and about the terms of citizenship.

2   Online democratic spaces for young people shall include horizontal channels of interaction, through which networks and collective associations can be formed, as well as vertical channels, providing dialogical links to various institutions that have power and authority over them.

3   It is up to young people to set the terms of their own political debate, without any external censorship.

4   E-citizenship involves both free expression and consequential political engagement. Young people are not to be expected to participate unless the scope and terms of their influence is explicitly outlined.

5   Among other aspects of e-citizenship, opportunities and resources will be provided to ensure that young people encounter others with whom they might disagree strongly, within various kinds of deliberative settings.

6   Young people are encouraged to mobilize online to counter social injustices and broaden the political agenda in any way that they see fit.

While the adoption of such principles would be promising, from a broadly democratic perspective, it should be acknowledged that they merely synthesize the strongest democratic elements of the two currently dominant models of youth e-citizenship. But policy is not only constructed out of what people are already doing. Both current models of youth e-citizenship can be accused of failing to transcend the historic limits that might be referred to as analog citizenship.

In speaking of analog citizenship, I have in mind three broad limitations. The first concerns ways of defining what is political. There is a curious similarity in the ways that both managed and autonomous e-citizenship projects conceive the political sphere. Whether as civic apprentices or emergent activists, participants in these projects are mainly concerned with traditional questions of power: being heard by those in authority; seeking the introduction of just policies; facilitating forms of collective action. None of these political approaches are by any means obsolete, but there are strong reasons for thinking that we are in a period of profound turbulence for the political sphere, in which hitherto neglected and affective concerns about identity, personal relationships, and domestic space are invading areas of thought and practice once occupied by instrumental and institutional political rationalism. The excellent chapter in this volume by Earl and Schussman raises important questions about the porous boundary between public affairs and private pleasures. The political is rooted in everyday life and participatory practices are increasingly regarded as forms of shared experience rather than mere aggregations of atomized interests. Democracy, which has often seemed to be anesthetized by constitutionality, is rooted in expressive, cathartic, and carnivalesque practices that connect public policy to mundane culture. But the e-citizenship projects we have explored tend to be characterized by an earnest solemnity: a language and aesthetic that allows little room for the banal sociability and cathartic frivolity that has contributed to the success of some of the most culturally radical social movements in the history of democracy. By emphasizing rational deliberation, at one end of the spectrum, and collective solidarity, at the other, the promoters of e-citizenship are in danger of perpetuating forms of symbolic exclusion that have over the years led many young people to conclude that these institutional arrangements, this language of ideology and policy, these battles of winners and losers are not for us.

A second limitation of the analog model of e-citizenship concerns the nature and use of digital technologies. Since the early twentieth century, political communication has been dominated by the broadcasting paradigm in which organized centers transmit messages to mass audiences. In the early days of the publicly available Internet many politicians saw what they thought was their chance to become their own broadcasters, preaching to the public without bothersome interference from journalists. In reality, the Internet has always been much more than a broadcasting medium. Yet the projects we have investigated are remarkably unadventurous in their approaches to many-to-many communication. For some, this potential was overwhelmed by an excessive sense of youth at risk; for others— even those seeking radical objectives—the most valuable use they felt they could make of digital technologies was to disseminate truth (or countertruth) more effectively than by any

other means. Digital technologies are good for more than the dissemination of neglected messages. The most innovative opportunities for political activity online involve specifically digital relationships to content, such as sampling, remixing, and social collaborations ranging from recommender systems to wikis.

Third, there has been a conspicuous absence in most of these youth e-citizenship projects to address key questions about what it means to be a youth. If, as Giddens, Beck, and others argue, life stages are increasingly encountered as reflexive projects, in which identities are constructed at least to some extent knowingly, why is there so little discussion of these choices and dilemmas within e-citizenship projects? Why do so few online "youth" projects challenge social definitions of childhood, adulthood, and transitions to maturity?

Transcending these limitations could entail the adoption of three further policy principles:

7   While e-citizenship embraces traditional questions of power, inequality, organization, and ideology, it does not exclude everyday political experience, such as the negotiation of feelings and sensitivities, the governance of spaces and relationships, and the many intersections between popular culture and power that affect life and lifestyle.

8   Young people are urged to use digital technologies innovatively with a view to utilizing and expanding their democratic features. (The chapters in this volume by Bers, Levine, and Rheingold offer some stimulating proposals in this regard.)

9   It is within the scope of youth e-citizenship to raise challenging questions about the nature and political status of children, adults, and youth, and to challenge condescending or stereotypical notions of youth identity.

We are coming closer to a coherent policy for youth e-citizenship, but still there is a major problem with the policy process to be addressed.

Thinking Democratically about Democracy: An Adventure in Policy Making

When governing institutions come to think about extending participatory democracy, it is remarkable how rarely they consult people about how they want to participate. The result is often a confused effort, in which policy makers decide how ordinary citizens should use their energies and citizens refuse to join in because they would rather be using their energies in other democratic ways. With policies for youth, there is all too often an even more profound dislocation between policy and public demand, for many young people do not yet have the vote, and therefore do not figure on politicians' radar screens, and those who do often speak a democratic language that does not easily translate into bureaucratic rationality. Ironically, therefore, much of the current emphasis by governments upon "giving the kids a say" amounts to little more than acting upon hunches about what will keep young people quiet.

If youth e-citizenship is to be more than a top-down exercise in bureaucratic management, a tenth policy principle needs to be added to complete this proposal:

10   All e-citizenship policy will be determined in partnership between official policy makers and young people themselves, using wikis and other forms of collaborative decision-making software.

The transition from an analog to a digital vision of youth e-engagement entails more than enthusiasm for the technocratic future. It calls for confidence in the self-determining ethos

of what Lance Bennett has called "actualizing citizens" (chapter 1) and what I have referred to as "autonomous citizenship." It calls for a democracy in which citizenship is not merely inherited as found, but made through creative experience. It calls, most immediately, for an inclusive, transparent, global debate about how the digital mediasphere is reshaping the expectations, desires, responsibilities, and prospects of young people in democratic societies.

Notes

1. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in School. Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship* (London: QCA, 1998), 7.

2. Henry Giroux, Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education, *Curriculum Inquiry* 10, no. 4 (1980), 329–66.

3. QCA, op. cit.: 1.5.

4. QCA, op. cit.: Appendix B: 67. For the sake of transparency, I should make clear that I was the author of this appendix.

5. Lynn Davies, Teaching about Conflict through Citizenship Education, *International Journal of Citizenship and Teacher Education* 1, no. 2 (2005): 19.

6. Chris Woodhead on *The Long View,* BBC Radio 4, 8 April, 2003.

7. Libby Brookes, Kid Power, *Guardian*, 26 April, 2003, 41.

8. Elizabeth Such, Oliver Walker, and Robert Walker, *Childhood* 12, no. 3 (2005): 301–26.

9. Steve Cunningham and Michael Lavalette, 'Active Citizens' or 'Irresponsible Truants'? School Student Strikes against the War, *Critical Social Policy* 24, no. 2 (2004): 264.

10. Elizabeth Frazer, Citizenship Education: Anti-political Culture and Political Education in Britain, *Political Studies* 48, no. 1 (2000): 88–103.

11. HM Government, *In the Service of Democracy: A Consultation Paper on a Policy for E-Democracy* (London: HMSO, 2002), 16.

12. This typology has much in common with Lance Bennett's Actualizing and Dutiful Citizens. Indeed, one might argue that managed citizenship tends to produce DCs and autonomous citizenship tends to produce ACs. One of the fruitful outcomes of collaborating on this volume is our intention to work further on exploring the theoretical and empirical connections between these concepts.

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14. Ulrich Beck, *The Politics of Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 78.

15. David Garland, *The Culture of Control* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

16. W. Lance Bennett, New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism, in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 20.

17. G. Longford, Pedagogies of Digital Citizenship and the Politics of Code, *Techné* 9, no. 1 (2005): 68.

18. Robert Luke, Habit@online: Web Portals as Purchasing Ideology, *Topia: A Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (fall 2002): 61–89.

19. Children and Young People's Unit, Cabinet Office (2002).

20. Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1991), 101.

21. The interviewees were Barry Griffiths of Headsup, interviewed on July 4, 2006; Rajeeb Dey of ESSA, interviewed on July 4, 2006; Paul Smyth and Tully Kewley of WIMPS, interviewed on July 28, 2006; Sofie Buckland of Students Against Sweatshops, interviewed on August 9, 2006; Matt of the George Fox 6 Campaign, interviewed on August 7, 2006; and Chaminda Jayanetti of Educationet, interviewed on August 10, 2006.

22. Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); John Durham Peters, Witnessing, *Media, Culture & Society* 23, no. 6 (2001): 707–23; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003).

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24. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, NeoLiberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London: UCL Press, 1996); Andrew Barry, *Political Machines: Governing a Technological Society* (London: Athlone Press, 2001); Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Barbara Cruickshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).