

Self-Mediation

New Media, Citizenship and Civil Selves

Edited by
Lilie Chouliaraki



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Notes on contributors

Lilie Chouliaraki is Professor of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. She has published extensively on the mediation of suffering and death as a politics of pity, on historical transformations in humanitarian communication from a politics of pity to a politics of irony and on the rise of technological self-mediation as therapeutic discourse. Previous publications include *Discourse in Late Modernity* (co-authored, 1999), *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006), *The Soft Power of War* (2007), and *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (2012).

John Hartley, AM, is Australian Research Council (ARC) Federation Fellow and Research Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, at Queensland University of Technology, Australia, where he is a Distinguished Professor. His research interests are in user-created content, digital futures and the 'evolutionary turn' in cultural science. Recent books include *The Uses of Digital Literacy* (2009) and *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (edited with K. McWilliam, 2009). Hartley is the Editor of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*.

Sonia Livingstone is Professor of Social Psychology in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. She is author or editor of 10 books and more than 100 academic articles and chapters in the fields of media audiences, children and the internet, domestic contexts of media use and media literacy. Recent books include *Young People and New Media* (2002), *The Handbook of New Media* (edited with Leah Lievrouw, 2006) and *Public Connection? Media Consumption and the Presumption of Attention* (with Nick Couldry and Tim Markham, 2007). She currently directs the thematic research network, EU Kids Online, for the European Commission's Safer Internet Plus programme.

Sabina Mihelj is a Lecturer at Loughborough University, UK.

Greg Myers is Professor of Rhetoric and Communication at Lancaster University, and author most recently of *Matters of Opinion: Talking about Public Issues* (2004) and *The Discourse of Blogs and Wikis* (2009). He is currently doing a study with Sofia Lampropoulou of stance in social science research interviews.

Zizi Papacharissi is Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago, USA, and has published widely on the social and political

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

consequences of online media. She is the author of *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (2010), a book which discusses how online media redefine our understanding of public and private in late-modern democracies, thus outlining new parameters for civic engagement in a digital age.

Nancy Thumim is a Lecturer at Leeds University. Her current research explores the idea of mediation processes, asking what such processes are and how they work in concrete contexts. Specifically she is looking at the idea of self-representation in 'new' and 'old' media and cultural spaces. Recent publications include: "Everyone has a story to tell": mediation and self representation in two UK institutions', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2009), 12(6), 617–638 and 'Exploring self-representations in Wales and London: tension in the text', in Hartley, J. & McWilliam, K. (eds), *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World* (2009).

Andrew Tolson is Professor of Media and Communication at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. He is a founding member of the Ross Priory Seminar on broadcast talk and has published widely in that field, including work on chat and talk shows, news presentation and political communication. Current research interests include the histories of television celebrity and political interviewing, the latter in the context of a project on the UK Election 2010 with other colleagues at DMU.

Farida Vis is a Lecturer at the University of Leicester, UK.

Liesbet van Zoonen holds the Chair in Media and Communication at Loughborough University, UK, and is Professor of Popular Culture at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands.

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Chapter 3

Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression

Sonia Livingstone

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Chapter 5

Audiences as media producers: content analysis of 260 blogs

Zizi Papacharissi

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Introduction

Lilie Chouliaraki

Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Blogs, online tutorials, citizen journalism, social networking sites and museum interactive services are but a few of the new technological platforms available for people to express themselves in public. This radical proliferation of popular participation in public culture is hailed for blurring traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers and for leading to hybrid forms of civic participation, which are characterised by playful activism, narcissistic self-expressions, critical discourse and fleeting solidarities that may or may not lead to the politicisation of public culture.

Drawing on a view of self-mediation as a terrain of potential democratisation that is, however, embedded within the regulative regimes of the market and the state, this volume critically explores the dynamics of mediated participation as an ambivalent discourse that is shifting the sensibilities and practices of civil life. Crucial to this exploration is the interface between technologies of mediation that enable the public visibility of the ordinary, on the one hand, and the hybrid potential for democratisation and control that such visibility entails, on the other.

To this end, this volume is organised along a two-dimensional axis, which conceptualises the dialectical relationship between new media technologies and the participatory discourses these technologies enable in terms of, what Foucault calls, a dual economy of freedom and constraint (Foucault, 1982): as both a 'democratisation of technology' and simultaneously as a 'technologisation of democracy'. The first dimension of the dialectic, the '*democratisation of technology*' (Burgess, 2006), addresses self-mediation from the perspective of the empowering potential of new media technologies as catalysts for the invention of new civil identities, new forms of public communication and connectivity and, therefore, potentially new practices of critical discourse and collective activism. The second dimension, the '*technologisation of democracy*', addresses self-mediation from the perspective of the regulative potential of new media technologies to control the discourses and genres of ordinary participation and, in so doing, to reproduce the institutional power relations that such participation seeks to challenge.

This dialectical axis partly reflects a divide between contexts of cultural production, with the 'democratisation of technology' focusing more explicitly on non-institutionalised sites with relatively minimal formal regulation, such as blogs, and the

‘technologisation of democracy’ focusing on institutionalised sites, such as museums or journalism, that recontextualise ordinary voices along the lines of, what Thumim after Bourdieu calls, a *‘hierarchy of systems of expression’* (this volume). Despite the divide, however, all contributions are informed by similar key conceptions on self-mediation: a conception of its publicness as ‘performance’ and a conception of the textuality of such publicness as discursive but not always narrative (Hartley, Chouliaraki, this volume).

In the following, I discuss both conceptions of self-mediation, the theoretical one, which defines publicness as performance, and the methodological one, which analyses self-mediation as a configuration of new textualities, and then proceed with situating the contributions of this volume within the dual economy of self-mediation: the democratisation of technology (chapters by John Hartley, Liesbet van Zoonen et al, Sonia Livingstone, Greg Myers) and the technologisation of democracy (chapters by Zizi Papacharissi, Andrew Tolson, Nancy Thumim, Lilie Chouliaraki).

Self-mediated publicness as performance

Mediated self-representation entails a particular view of publicness that thematises performance, voice and claims to recognition. Whereas it often echoes the Habermasian public sphere in its appreciation of the deliberative nature of public communication, the performative conception of publicness departs from the Habermasian view in three important ways. First, it blurs the boundaries between the public and the private towards the direction of an increasing personalisation of public discourse. Challenging traditional views on citizenship, performative publicness is thus characterised less by collectivist narratives of the self and more by individualist narratives that emphasise the self’s ‘autonomy, control and ability to question authority’ (Papacharissi, 2010: 163). Second, performative publicness expands traditional understandings of publicness as linguistic practice, that is as pragmatic principles of interpersonal communication, in order to include the spectacular dimensions of public performance, such as still and moving image as well as sound, and thus to promote a view of publicness closer to Hannah Arendt’s ‘space of appearance’: a non-territorial and contingently established space that emerges out of people doing things together, ‘in the manner of speech and action’ (Arendt, 1958: 198-9). Third, it abandons the normativity of the Habermasian public sphere in that it corrects its over-reliance on the linguistic rationalism of its actors as they strive for consensus with a new emphasis on the affective and playful dimensions of public communication, including satire and parody, but also with the ethics of witnessing and the politics of care.

Performance, in this sense, constitutes both a reduction and an enhancement of traditional practices of publicness. On the one hand, it appears to restrict the scope of civil action, insofar as it does not directly engage with traditional modes of public-political practice, such as voting, yet, on the other hand, it authorises informal or playful activities, such as blogging or jamming, as legitimate practices of this new publicness (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Voice, it follows, is a characteristic property of performative publicness in the sense that, unlike mainstream views of citizenship as ends-oriented political activism, voice thematises the importance of simply speaking out ‘in the knowledge that you will have the ear of the community’ as a sovereign act of civil identity in itself (Stevenson, 2007: 256).

This emphasis on voice, on announcing one’s presence, further throws into relief the centrality of recognition in practices of performative publicness. This is because the

mediation of the self forcefully thematises the reciprocal acts of speaking, in the knowledge that one is being listened to, and of listening, with a view to acknowledging the other's voice, as a constitutive dimension of citizenship (Couldry, 2010). By throwing into relief the mundane or ordinary dimension of voice, self-mediation therefore facilitates the opening up of what Honneth calls, 'a horizon of ethical value' within which people are 'recognised for their own achievements and abilities in such a way that they learn to esteem and value themselves' (2007: 261). There is, in this account, an inherently democratic potential in all mediated practices of self-presentation, insofar as such practices use personal narratives to establish mutually associative relations among strangers and, thus, potentially galvanise new civil selves and narratives of collective action in the space of appearance.

Whilst the idea of participatory democracy has traditionally been linked to this collectivist vision of an association among strangers established through the free presentations of the self, the performative publicness of self-mediation nonetheless entails an inherent contradiction that potentially undermines its liberal political vision. Whilst it addresses the public as a space for the appearance of the self, performative publicness simultaneously rests upon an atomistic view of the self as the original source of political will and moral sentiment, on 'an individualized identity that is particular to me and I discover in myself' (Taylor, 1995: 99). Self-mediation, in this sense, operates simultaneously both on the democratic principle of an equal polyphony of voluntary voices as the basis for participatory citizenship and on an inner moral self as the single most authentic expression of publicness.

Authenticity, in this sense, becomes both a precondition and a challenge for the performative model of publicness, insofar as its collectivist vision of civil participation may sit uneasily with the primacy on self-expression and self-actualisation that practices of self-mediation, at the same time, promote (see Tolson, Thumim this volume). It is precisely this close articulation of authenticity, not only discourses of citizenship as recognition but also with neoliberal discourses of consumerism, that increasingly 'marketise' the political and cultural spheres, which situates self-mediation at the heart of a controversy around its 'democratisation' potential.

Captured in Turner's rhetorical dilemma of self-mediation as either a 'democratic' or a 'demotic' turn (2010), this debate problematises the optimistic argument about the democratisation of the space of appearance, by pointing to the appropriation of self-mediation in the service of private profit or state control. Self-mediation, in this account, is at worst a corporate strategy that trivialises citizenship in the name of a narcissistic celebration of the 'the private, the ordinary, the everyday' (Turner, 2010: 22), and at best, a form of unpaid labour as citizens are voluntarily co-opted in projects of power that may have a therapeutic value in 'giving voice' to the ordinary, yet ultimately reproduce local asymmetries and global inequalities (Scott, 2005; Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Thumin & Chouliaraki, 2010).

Self-mediation, it follows, is a deeply ambivalent process that cannot be analysed, I argue, without detailed attention not only to the specificity of its technological contexts of emergence but also, importantly, to the particularity of the discursive articulations it gives rise to; between politics and the market, expressive citizenship and consumerist authenticity, activism and therapy, solidarity and narcissism. It is to the analytical task of identifying the multiple articulations of self-mediation in the technological textualities of the new media, addressed as these are by all contributions in this volume, that I now turn.

The textualities of self-mediated publicness

Self mediation is a textual process, *par excellence*. In re/representing ordinary voice through media technologies, it inevitably employs configurations of semiotic systems, from language to image (still or moving) to sound, in new hypermediated textualities that change both the genres of public communication and our modes of engagement with them (Livingstone, 2004; Deuze, 2006).

Whereas such changes in the genres of self-mediation and their interpretative publics are a major focus in this volume, the point that needs to be emphasised is that such textualities do not simply represent pre-existing selves, individual or collective, but constitute such selves in the very process of representing them. This view of the textualities of self-mediation draws upon a 'speech act' theory of meaning as performative, as bringing into being the identities it seeks to name, rather than as constative, naming identities that originate outside meaning. Performativity, then, situates the study of discourse at the heart of its conception of publicness as performance – the link between performativity, the capacity of meaning to constitute civil selves, and discourse, the material manifestation of such capacity on the textualities of self-mediation, being theorised in the works of Foucault (1982) and Butler (1997), but see also van Zoonen et al, this volume.

Yet, rather than a transparent process of naming, this discursive constitution of civil selves is embedded within broader ethico-political tensions that historically define the social and cultural contexts of self-mediation in the first place. Tensions, therefore, between a participatory discourse of citizenship and a therapeutic discourse of community (Thumim, this volume) or between an altruistic discourse of humanitarianism and a narcissistic discourse of personal trauma (Chouliaraki, this volume) cannot be treated as exclusively textual but are to be taken as evidence of social processes of struggle between the empowering and the regulative dimensions of self-mediation, as these co-exist within specific technological and generic contexts – interactive museum sites or convergence journalism reports.

Central in critical approaches to textual analysis (Fairclough 1993, 1995; Wodak 1996), this focus on ambivalence cannot be served by one single analytical framework but calls for multiple, text-oriented methodologies that can grasp the tenuous interface between the performativity of hyper-textualities and the performance of civil selves – between discourse and the social.

Instead, then, of enumerating the specific approaches to text analysis applied in this volume, qualitative and quantitative, it would be more productive to engage with these two analytical foci on the textualities of self-mediation that our contributions draw attention to, along the axis of the 'democratisation of technology' and the 'technologisation of democracy' dialectics I introduced earlier. This dialectics of technology and citizenship, or discourse and the social, inevitably informs every single contribution of the volume, even though, depending on analytical focus, each ultimately tips the balance towards one dimension of the dialectic – hence the use of this dual axis to cluster contributions in two key categories.

The analytical focus on the 'democratisation of technology' draws attention to the ways in which self-mediation reconfigures the textual boundaries of traditional public genres, through the new affordances of online media (the multi-mediality of hyperlinks, for instance, or real-time interactive options) and thus opens up unprecedented possibilities for polyphonic texts that alter our interpretative engagement with them. By

celebrating the use of ordinary voice as a catalyst in the presentation of civil selves, this analytical focus engages with: i) the spectacularity of carnivalesque online practices of playful resistance, which deliberately mix linguistic with bodily semiotics to subvert the mainstream rationalism of the public sphere (Hartley); ii) the new collaboratively-authored genres of 'ordinary' sociality, such as apology and parody at the service of global citizenship (van Zoonen et al); iii) the reflexive practices of self-presentation and stylisation, characteristic of teenagers' use of social networking sites (Livingstone) as well as iv) the refashioning of traditional practices of public deliberation and practical education through blogging (Myers).

The analytical focus on the 'technologisation of democracy' draws attention to the ways in which the technological/institutional articulation of these genres strategically appropriates autobiographical and testimonial genres so as to infuse institutions, such as the museum or journalism, with new ethico-political legitimacy and public trust. What emerges, as a consequence, is a profound transformation in the institutional textualities of self-mediation, be these the communicative entitlements of journalistic deliberation (Papacharissi) or online broadcasting (Tolson), the narrativity of testimony (Chouliaraki) or the dialogicality of museum history (Thumim).

A key characteristic of this 'technologisation' of textualities is, indeed, the mutation of these textualities into a narrative continuum from impressionistic diary-writing into interrupted story-telling, which replaces the cohesive structures of traditional forms of public communication with the hyper-textualities of 'bricolage' - the 'highly personalized, continuous and more or less autonomous assembly, disassembly and reassembly of mediated reality' (Deuze, 2006: 66). The self-referentiality of journalistic blogging (Papacharissi), the individuated performance of authenticity (Tolson), the inattentive activism in disaster reporting (Chouliaraki) or the therapeutic individuation of public memory in museum websites are only some of the aspects of civil selves that this technologisation of voice makes possible.

Falling under these two categories, the eight chapters of this volume are organised in clusters of four. I next present each, in turn.

Outline of contributions

In the 'democratisation of technology' section, chapters tend to emphasise the empowering potential of self-mediation as an act of civil identity. This is so particularly in the Hartley and van Zoonen et al contributions, whilst Livingstone focuses on the self-reflexive, albeit not automatically civil, agency of online networking and Myers offers a cautionary argument against the ego-centricity of empowerment.

Hartley's chapter, entitled 'Silly citizenship', uses a historical analytic approach in order to argue that emerging forms of self-mediation have shifted the performance of civil selves from state-oriented models of citizenship to new playful ones, which place the child, a figure that is marginal but instrumental in the dynamics of public participation, at the centre of its practices. If Hartley's chapter functions as a kind of 'manifesto' for the catalytic role of self-mediation in transforming the space of appearance, the contribution by van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj, entitled 'Performing citizenship on YouTube: activism, satire and online debate around the anti-Islam video *Fitna*', offers a large empirical basis for this claim. In light of the YouTube uploads in response to the Dutch anti-Muslim film 'Fitna', it shows how a new form of citizenship as connectivity emerges through the playful reworking of religious and political identities into the

performance of 'global' selves. Sonia Livingstone's chapter similarly deals with playful self-mediation, yet this time focus falls on processes of stylisation in teenagers' use of social networking sites; drawing on their own accounts of online choices, she suggests that young people's sense of self emerges through their reflexive calculations of risk and opportunity as they tread the tenuous space between intimate relations and public self-presentations. Finally, Greg Myers' argument in 'Stance-taking and public discussion in blogs' takes a cautious approach to the empowering potential of self-mediation, by demonstrating that blogs are more about acts of self-assertion, or 'Here is me!' as he puts it, and less about the dialogic exploration of shared understandings – a process coded in the textual patterns of 'stance-taking' across a large empirical body of blogs.

In the 'technologisation of democracy' section, chapters tend to emphasise the regulative aspects of self-mediation. Prominent particularly in the chapters by Thumim and Chouliaraki, which engage with institutional appropriations of self-mediation, the ambivalence of technologisation is also taken up by Papacharissi and Tolson, who explore crucial interfaces between non-institutionalised and institutionalised practices of self-mediation and thus could also be seen as productive transition points between the two sections.

Zizi Papacharissi's chapter, 'Audiences as media producers: content analysis of 260 blogs', explores how the boundaries of professional journalism are today re-negotiated under the pressures of blogging; differences between hers and Myers' research granted, Papacharissi's work shares a similar scepticism with the deliberative potential of blogging and points to the ambivalent implications of its self-referential and intensely personalised narratives for the institutional functions of journalism. In a detailed analysis of YouTube make-up tutorials, Tolson's 'A new authenticity? Communicative practices on YouTube' chapter shows how the performance of ordinary expertise as a form of authentic civil practice draws its appeal from breaking with the authority of television's communicative entitlements, yet becomes itself embedded in the power relations of a new economy of unpaid citizen labour. Thumim's contribution, 'Self-representation in museums: therapy or democracy?', similarly engages in a textual analysis of 'oral history' discourses in two major museum projects (the Museum of London and the Smithsonian American Art Museum), demonstrating that the ambivalence at the heart of such institutional discourses between democratic and therapeutic versions of civil selves is ultimately resolved in favour of the therapeutic – a 'speaking out' that may punctuate the space of appearance with ordinary voices but fails to articulate these as aspirational discourses of social change. Finally, Chouliaraki's chapter, 'Ordinary witnessing in post-television news: toward a new moral imagination', shows how the rise of ordinary witnessing in BBC's online disaster news, the earthquakes in Kashmir 2005 and Haiti 2010, sets into motion a complex dynamics of cosmopolitan 'de-centering', through the proliferation of global solidarity discourses, and communitarian 're-centering', through the dominance of Western discourses of 'traumatised citizenship', thus illustrating the ambivalence of self-mediation as both an altruistic and a narcissistic practice of global citizenship.

This collection of chapters inevitably captures only an aspect of the empirical realities of self-mediation. It provides, nonetheless, a rich and diverse interdisciplinary perspective, which draws on Media & Communications, Linguistics, Sociology, Journalism Studies and Cultural Studies in order to theorise this crucial aspect of public communication as a novel and promising, albeit ambivalent, enactment of civil selves. In so doing, not only does it offer insightful reflections on this major transformative process

of performative publicness but also provides us with glimpses of the new empirical manifestations of civil selves that increasingly come to define our culture.

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Part I:

Self-Mediation and the Democratisation of Technology

Silly citizenship

John Hartley

*ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology,
Brisbane, Australia*

This paper traces historical changes in the concept of citizenship, in order to show how it has shifted from a state enterprise to a form of self-organising, user-created, ludic association, modelled by online social networks in which children – formally non-citizens but crucial to the continuing and changing discursive practices of citizenship-formation – are active agents. The implications of ‘silly’ citizenship for communication scholarship are considered.

Citizenship: child’s play?

‘Citizenship’¹ is a term of *association* among *strangers*. Access to it involves discursive struggle: contested identities and symbolic meanings, differing power relations and strategies of inclusion, exclusion and action, and unequal room for manoeuvre or productivity in the *appropriations* of citizenship for any given group or individual. In a discussion of children’s rights and citizenship in Brazil, Leticia Veloso has put it this way:

For some, citizenship and the forms of access to it are still determined by their marginalized, stratified, and racialized subject position. For others, responsible, active, participating, and ‘radical democratic’ citizenship can take place only in the context of the reproduction of privilege. ... What remains to be seen is to what extent either group will be able to take action to counter this predicament. (Veloso, 2008, p. 56)

That question is a good one with which to launch a consideration of the evolution of contemporary citizenship as discursive struggle. It makes clear that the chances for and experience of citizenship are (systematically) not equal for all, but it goes on to draw our attention to the *actions* taken by different groups to deal with their circumstances, and thence to the prospects for integrated access to and practice of citizenship for all. Veloso’s focus on children is also important, for children are (by definition) *not* citizens ... and yet they must *become* citizens if the reproduction of the system is to continue.

Thus, the actual process of citizenship-formation is ‘carried’ by children who – individually, collectively and differentially – *produce* citizenship in their actions, forms of association and thence identities. Children are thus at one and the same time the least important component of institutionalised citizenship, since they remain non-citizens, and its most important ‘subjects’, since they necessarily and continuously *constitute the practice of citizenship formation*. And because they undertake that practice ‘insensibly’ (to use an eighteenth-century term favoured by Edward Gibbon, expressing the unthinking relation between subjects and historical change), children are prime agents of change for citizenship, to the extent that their unconsidered actions and unselfconscious association may model new modes of citizenship.

The extension of ‘new media’, including computer-based social networks, mobile telephony and globally dispersed entertainment formats, into the space and time of childhood has enabled

children's discursive actions and choices to become '*relatively autonomous*' (as the Althusserians would have put it). Certainly they are freer than via previous media technologies from surveillance and control by parental or other authoritative institutions. However, at the same time their actions, choices and discursive interactions are now objectively trackable, via clickstream data, instant messaging systems, internet forums and the like. Thus, it is now unprecedentedly possible to isolate and observe the cultural practice of 'association among strangers' in relation to children's own actions as a 'class'. These developments have attracted considerable attention from latter-day 'child savers' (Platt, 2009) and 'correction and protection' activists, for whom 'citizenship' means making sure that children are *excluded from* online participation.² Regrettably, less has been heard on the topic from those interested in the *propagation of* civic discourse. Towards the end of this paper, I plan to show how certain 'under-age' mischief may give us a glimpse of citizenship-formation 'on the fly' – in the apparently unlikely context of spoofs, silliness and the dance-off. I argue that such discursive antics provide an important lesson for citizenship *theory*, which has focused too much on citizenship as a static or definable condition, frequently understood as universal, when in fact it should be understood as a *relational identity*, inconstant, dynamic and evolving.

In order to demonstrate my point, a short history of citizenship is in order – in which, it will be noted, children apparently play no part. It is intended to demonstrate not only historical shifts in the relationship between individuals and the state, but also the extent to which citizenship is a *discursive practice*, at the heart of which is the continually challenging problem of how to reconcile self and stranger in modern associated life, a problem that resolves itself into the question of what ordinary people (as opposed to governing elites) can and do use for the purposes of *self-representation* within technologically enabled *social networks*. Here is where silliness – and children – prove to be more important than social theory has tended to admit.

History or science?

The term 'citizenship' has come a long way since its first recorded use in English in 1611, when it translated an unremarkable French word: '*Citoyennerie*, a Citizenship, the freedom of a Citie' (*OED*). It has since lost any necessary reference to cities, although Holston and Appadurai (1996) argue for the restoration of the city's analytical primacy. However, in order to achieve *informational* 'freedom', the concept had to break free of real cities. In modern disciplinary knowledge-systems, abstract, explicit knowledge displaces embodied, tacit know-how. In this context, 'citizenship' achieved the status of a concept only once it became an abstraction. Only then could it contribute to the growth of knowledge. Hence it is effectively a nineteenth-century invention, required by the rapidly expanding modern knowledge-system (Wallerstein, 2001, p. 66ff.) to describe the equally rapidly expanding modern polity, as the nation-state and colonial empire took shape. Having escaped the ground of actual cities into the rarefied air of abstract metaphor, citizenship could become – like many professors of communication – a discursive 'frequent flyer'. It commutes around different disciplinary domains, with occasional stopovers in ordinary language. Like Raymond Williams's original 'keywords' (1976), it is inevitably accompanied by historical and conceptual baggage (see Ong, 1999; Isin & Turner, 2002; Barnett, 2003, p. 81ff.), which, despite the long-haul process of abstraction, citizenship continues to lug around.

Part of that history is disciplinary. Thus, citizenship brings with it from political science and history a focus on the relations between a state and the individual, with connotations of mutual status: rights, duties, conduct, allegiance, obligation, powers and protection. In the study of communication, on the other hand, there has been a greater emphasis on the identity of the citizen within cultural practices and sense-making systems. However, precisely because it is a