

After the Performance

A Mayor's Diary on Facebook

Bjarki Valtýsson

Abstract

In May 2010, the Best Party won the municipal elections in Reykjavik, and the party's leading figure, comedian Jón Gnarr, was appointed Mayor of Reykjavik. During the election campaign, the party 'performed democracy' by playing with irrational, satirical discourses that challenged traditional discourses within political public spheres. Soon after his inauguration, Gnarr began a Facebook page called 'The Mayor's Diary' on which he wrote openly about the challenges faced by a newcomer to politics. Approximately 10% of the Icelandic population follows his profile. This article presents an analysis of the communication conducted on the Mayor's Diary, particularly of how Facebook as a media environment conditions the Mayor's performative manoeuvres and, correspondingly, how the subversive discourses galvanised in the election campaign can begin ricocheting back when discussions move from cultural public spheres to political public spheres.

Keywords: democracy, Facebook, public sphere, networked publics, Reykjavik, Best Party

Introduction

In October 2008, the major Icelandic banks collapsed. This had severe consequences for Iceland's society and population. The financial crisis spawned great distrust in the system and created a void that a new political force, called the 'Best Party', took advantage of. With slogans such as 'Polar bear to the zoo', 'A drug-free Parliament by 2020', 'We want the next president of Iceland to be a mentally disabled woman', 'We promise to end corruption by being openly corrupt', and 'We can offer more free things because we don't intend to keep our promises', the Best Party received approximately 35% of the votes in the May 2010 municipal election. This proved to be sufficient to earn the comedian Jón Gnarr, who leads the party, the title Mayor of Reykjavik.

Prior to the vote, the Best Party 'performed democracy' by creating a subversive discourse akin to the carnival (Bakhtin 1984) in order to reverse 'traditional' ways of addressing issues in the political public sphere. Furthermore, by playing on his double role as a well-known comedian and then a 'serious' politician, Gnarr touches upon important features at the intersection of cultural public spheres and political public spheres.

During the election campaign, the Best Party created an irrational, satirical discourse that enabled party members to reach down to the civic cultures of the lifeworld, galvanizing civic agency in the general population. The Party capitalized on its followers by using the multimodal and multichannel characteristics of Internet communication to

generate processes of mass self-communication (Castells 2009). During the campaign, these discourses, formed within the cultural public sphere, deliberately played upon elements of the affective, passionate, and ridiculous.

After the election, however, the Best Party could no longer ‘hide’ in the cultural public spheres, and the nature of the party’s celebrated discourses was suddenly reversed. Now, the subversive discourse ricocheted back, as did the multichannelled voices of the people who had supported the party. This is apparent in the Mayor’s Diary on Facebook, where Gnarr writes openly about the challenges faced by a newcomer to politics – and receives large number of replies from citizens that form as networked publics on Facebook.

The present article aims to analyse the communication that takes place on the Mayor’s Diary. I will focus in particular on how Facebook as a medium environment *conditions* the *performative dimensions* that served the Mayor so well in the election campaign and how Facebook’s dialogical features generate a polarization of *for* and *against* and of *entertainment* and *efficacy*.

The Mayor’s Diary

During the election campaign, the Best Party played deliberately on a subversive, carnivalesque discourse that created an ironic distance to ‘rational’ municipality politics in political public spheres. Gnarr constantly appealed to the absurd, making statements and promises that are patently unrealizable. He suggested, for example, blowing up a bridge in Reykjavik because of its ugliness; he wanted to introduce squirrels (not currently part of the local fauna) into the country; and he encouraged people to start eating pigeons.

During the campaign, the Best Party applied various communicative tactics, many of which were performative in nature. The party’s webpage served as a hub for much of this communication, which again was strategically anchored in a communication spiral that took advantage of the multichannel and multimodal (Castells 2009) potential of communication in the digital age. In this context, messages from the party travelled from one context to the other, from one service to the other in order to reach out to as many as possible. This does not, however, mean that all of the communication was essentially framed as digital communication but, rather, that narrowcasting, broadcasting, live performances, amateur videos, professional videos, songs, slogans, speeches, etc. travelled within the same strategically designed communication spiral.

It is therefore safe to say that members of the Best Party were not alien to applying cross-media communication in their campaign. It was, however, first after the election that Gnarr began communicating via the Mayor’s Diary on Facebook. Nevertheless, the dialogical nature of this kind of communication cannot be understood without referring to the history of how the Best Party communicated to the general public during the election campaign. Playing with particular functionalities of Facebook – especially responsiveness, proximity, and encouragement of discussion – represents a continuation of the Best Party’s constructed discourse in framing the party and its members as people just like you and me. Indeed, the party constructed itself as representing the ‘New Iceland’, taking a clear step away from established political discourses in the upper political public spheres, which were simultaneously regarded as corrupt and filled with established, failed elites.

After the election, the Best Party's webpage remains static with the only dynamic feature being a screen shot to the Mayor's Diary on Facebook – which explains why it is the Mayor's use of Facebook that frames the analysis conducted in the present article. As previously noted, the main aim is to analyse how Facebook's affordances frame and condition the performative manoeuvres of the Mayor, and whether he can succeed by applying communicative tactics similar to those that served him so well during the election campaign. In other words, can the party still maintain affective and passionate communications that traditionally belong to the cultural public spheres, or must the party's irrational discourses transform into rational, 'hands-on' municipal politics? The communication on the Mayor's Diary bears witness to these transformations.

Method & Theory

Methodologically, I apply qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000; Hsieh & Shannon 2005) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 2003) to the Mayor's Diary on Facebook in order to identify the most prominent categories generated by the discussion and the discourse. I analysed the Mayor's Diary from its start on 29 July 2010 until 15 January 2013. As this generated a considerable amount of data, I first conducted an inductive category development, followed by a deductive category application (Mayring 2000). This allowed me to identify certain patterns within the data, which I then analysed, inspired by Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1992), i.e. text, discourse practice, and discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practice. The identified themes, which will later guide the analysis, are *dissemination*, *polarization* (for and against), and the *efficacy* (ritual) – *entertainment* (theatre) *braid*.

I make use of Jürgen Habermas' writings on the public sphere, Manuel Castells' writings on mass self-communication, Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the carnival, Chantal Mouffe's notion of agonistic pluralism, as well as theories on publics, counter-publics, and networked publics to frame my analyses theoretically.

The communication that takes place on the Mayor's Diary is conducted primarily in Icelandic. I have translated the quotes from Icelandic to English.

Networked, Post-bourgeois Hybrids

In its simplest conceptualization, the public sphere can be looked upon as a communicative space – or as a space of communication. Concomitant with digital communication, this space acquired an extra dimension. The notion of digital public spheres (Gripsrud & Moe 2010; Valtýsson 2010) thus becomes a useful means of describing processes through which digital media and democracy intertwine. In the case presented here (as in most cases), however, the 'virtual' and the 'real' public spheres intertwine – and do so in a networked fashion. This, at least, is the case in most complex societies, a point that Habermas makes in *Between Facts and Norms*, where he applies the metaphor of the network to account for the different kinds and levels of public spheres, conceptualizing them as 'a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local, and subcultural arenas' (373).

Habermas emphasizes the importance of regarding public spheres as possessing a differentiated quality and a networked structure. These public spheres are, moreover,

driven by communicative publics, which act and form on the basis of different agendas, depending on the density, organizational complexity, and range of communication. More precisely, Habermas refers to such differentiated publics as episodic, occasional, and abstract (374).

Similarly, Fraser, responding to Habermas' earlier works, speaks of weak publics and strong publics, with the former consisting of opinion formation and the latter of opinion formation and decision-taking (1992). This distinction is akin to what Habermas terms, already in his original blueprint, the public sphere in the world of letters and the public sphere in the political realm. Habermas thereby distinguishes between *critical debate* in the world of letters, which focuses on the experiences of citizens' subjectivity, on the one hand, and *rational-critical debate*, which belongs to the political realm, on the other (1989). Habermas thus stresses the importance of *rationality* belonging to the political public sphere. There should not, however, be a sharp distinction between the two, as Fraser implies with her idea of a post-bourgeois conception that 'would enable us to think about strong *and* weak publics, as well as about various hybrid forms' (1992, 136). Here, Fraser draws attention to the fact that there are analytical advantages to not treating strong and weak publics, passions, humour, and rationality separately. Indeed, the Best Party stages its performative manoeuvres in the post-bourgeois frictions between weak and strong publics.

It is precisely at the intersection between the literary public sphere, also framed as the *cultural public sphere* (McGuigan 2005), and the political sphere that the Best Party's communicative acts created a post-bourgeois communicative environment that enabled interesting hybrid forms of strong and weak publics. This environment, which began as a counter-public characterized by satirical discourse, increased in density, scope, and organizational complexity, shifting from being a ritualistic performance to getting 35% of the vote. In short, the Best Party managed to play on the affective, passionate, humorous, ironic, and informal characteristics of cultural public spheres (Hartley & Green 2006; McGuigan 2005), which were initially generated by counter-publics that deliberately challenged the dominant political discourses. Inherent in such counter-publics is a certain dialectic in which, despite originally being intended to address the like-minded, 'these activities occur with an understanding that oppositionality will be directed toward or constitute other, wider publics' (Brouwer 2006, 200). In other words, they are characterized by relational dynamics.

In its infancy, the weak counter-public of the Best Party emerged in a political landscape in which people had lost faith in conventional Icelandic municipal politics. In short, people were looking for new choices anchored in the civic cultures of the life-world rather than in the political public sphere. In most counter-publics, opposition and attentiveness to its subordinate status (Warner 2002) represent core defining traits – in this case, an opposition that created a subversive, irrational, carnivalesque discourse aimed at the ruling political elites.

However, when a radicalized public sphere conception is applied, 'the public sphere is no longer understood as a singular deliberative space but a complex field of multiple contesting publics, including both dominant and counter-publics of various forms' (Dahlberg 2007, 60). This implies that relational dynamics between publics are in constant transformation depending on the modes of communication used and the actual content of transmission. The publics that flocked behind the Best Party in the election campaign were

thus constituted differently than were the networked publics on the Mayor's Diary on Facebook. This, at least, is the case when networked publics are conceptualized as 'space constructed through networked technologies' and as an 'imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice' (boyd 2011, 39).

However, it is not only the space and the inherent functionalities of such space that allow networked publics to emerge. Referring to Habermas' writings again, the engagement of participative publics is driven by communicative actions within the cultural public spheres. These processes are negotiated in the cultural realm of the lifeworld where knowledge is renewed and transmitted and where processes of cultural reproduction, social integration, formation of solidarity, and personal identity thrive (Habermas 1987). While the Best Party's subversive values generated favourable processes of cultural reproduction and formation of solidarity prior to the election, the dormant civic cultures that had served them so well turned partially against them on the Mayor's Diary after the elections. What emerged was thus cultural reproduction and formation of solidarity that focused more on the rational criticality of established deliberation in the political public sphere than on the affective, humorous, and informal communication in the cultural public spheres. Indeed, shortly after the Best Party was established as a legitimate force in the political public sphere, it lost its oppositionality and begat another counter-public, which emerged as a networked counter-public on the Mayor's Diary on Facebook.

Affection and Deliberation

As previously noted, it is in the interplay between reason and passion, political and cultural public spheres that the Best Party momentarily managed to create a frame of reference to which a significant proportion of voters in Reykjavik could relate. By refraining from using institutionalized political jargon, the Best Party's performative and affective communicative tactics engaged voters to flock behind the party.

The Best Party's celebrated discourses thereby challenged the established discourses of the political public sphere by appealing to issues that have more resonance with folk culture than with some sort of political elite culture. The communicative means of doing this was similar to what Bakhtin describes in his account of the Medieval carnival, i.e. the use of humour, the absurd, and the grotesque to create ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various genres of billingsgate (1984).

By constructing these absurd discourses, Gnarr plays on the efficacy-entertainment braid, which Schechner constitutes between *ritual* and *theatre*. Prior to the election, the Best Party mostly used communicative acts associated with entertainment, belonging to Schechner's theatre realm. Here, emphasis is placed on *fun*, the constitution of a *present public*, and the *here-and-now*. In the theatre realm, the *performer is in charge* and knows what he or she is doing, the *audience watches* and *appreciates*, and the main locus of creativity is at the *individual* level (2003) – in this case, the calculated staging of the comedian Jón Gnarr. This *theatrical entertainment* was present in the media environment that the Best Party constituted prior to the elections as well as in the performative acts of which the party made use.

After the election, however, the *efficacy* that Schechner associates with *ritual* is a *result-based* process. It works primarily through *symbolic time*, and here, the performer

is possessed (in this case, as politician). This is a mode of *collective creativity* as opposed to the individual creativity of the entertainment mode. In short, the efficacy of the ritual mode significantly resembles the political public sphere. There is, however, one element of Schechner's braid that contradicts the distinction between political public sphere and cultural public spheres, because, according to his model, criticism is discouraged in the *ritual mode* yet flourishes in the *entertainment mode*. Even if this is true when considering Bakhtin's writings, Facebook as a communicative environment offers the networked publics that emerge on the Mayor's Diary the possibility to respond, and as will be clear later in this article, the public does indeed respond – sometimes with a vengeance.

Finally, just as in the case of cultural and political public spheres, there is no clear distinction between Schechner's ritual mode and entertainment mode. Indeed, they overlap on many occasions, especially when revisiting a concept such as that of Fraser's post-bourgeois publics. The important point from the perspective of this particular case is how the Best Party staged its communicative acts through performance prior to the election by using theatrical techniques based on carnival imagery to construct a spectacle that reversed the rituals of political discourse.

These protocols and rituals based on laughter are distinct from the political ceremonies to which people are accustomed, clearly connoting the medieval carnival. Here, *time* plays an important role as the carnival was 'the feast of becoming, change, and renewal' (Bakhtin 1984, 10), making it 'hostile to all that was immortalized and completed' (1984, 10). The Best Party's campaign can thus be seen as 'a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men and of certain norms and prohibitions of usual life' (1984, 15), creating alternative forms of communication and meaning relative to established forms of political deliberation. This was quite clear in the election when representatives from other parties were trapped time and again by the power of grotesque and absurd laughter. They simply did not know whether to participate in the absurd world of the Best Party or whether to attempt to reverse the theatrical entertainment taking place in the cultural public sphere to the familiar discourses of deliberation taking place in the political public sphere. In this case, deliberation is understood from the viewpoint of Habermas' deliberative public sphere, which as previously noted, emphasizes the significance of a public sphere of rational-critical deliberation. In the context of Internet-deliberative public spheres, Dahlberg provides the following definition: 'This deliberation is an inter-subjective performative process that involves the transformation of privately-oriented selves into publicly-oriented 'citizens', and pre-deliberative positions into critical-reflexive public opinions' (2007, 50).

Obviously, the Best Party successfully broke the political rituals of Reykjavik's municipal politics by appealing to *theatrical entertainment* rather than to the *rituals* of Habermasian political deliberation, based on critical reflexivity. In other words, they played upon the *political* in Mouffe's sense (1999; 2005) rather than upon *politics* – antagonistically, rather than by means of 'the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created' (2005, 9). According to Mouffe, however, the aim of democratic politics is to transform those dimensions of antagonism between enemies into agonism between adversaries. The post-bourgeois hybrids play a central role here in achieving a balance between the affective criticality of cultural public spheres and the rational criticality and deliberation of political publics spheres, a process that Mouffe refers to as *agonistic pluralism*:

The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs (1999, 755-756).

The Best Party was certainly successful in mobilizing the passionate, irrational, absurd, fun, and grotesque elements of cultural public spheres prior to the election. The carnival, however, is a temporary construction. Reality kicks back when the feast is over, and this is a fact that the Best Party could not help but notice on the Mayor's Diary on Facebook. The question remains as to whether the networked publics constituted on the Mayor's Diary are to be viewed as examples of antagonism or of agonism.

Succumbing to Democracy?

The following analysis is structured on three themes that emerge on the Mayor's Diary on Facebook: *dissemination*, *polarization*, and the *efficacy–entertainment braid*. The first theme links directly to the inherent functionalities of Facebook as a media environment, as it is well suited to announcing events, providing brief and current information concerning daily activities, and linking to other online media that respond to the party's press releases or discuss its work. This can be seen as a very controlled self-promotion of the party's positive activities. However, as is the case in all media environments that encourage dialogical communication, such controlled self-promotion can produce potentially reversed effects.

The second theme is characterized by an increase in contentious discussions as the networked publics communicate with the Mayor and his staff, revealing a tendency towards polarization: Either you are with the party, or you are against it. Here, the keywords identified on Fairclough's textual and discourse practice levels (1992) are *trust*, *betrayal*, *values*, *practices*, and the communication that is conducted tends to feed into antagonism between enemies rather than agonism between adversaries. It is very much in these contexts that affective processes can be detected through applied rhetorics, framing, and language use.

Finally, the last theme touches upon Fairclough's social practice dimension, as it is here that tensions between the *efficacy* (ritual) and the *entertainment* (theatre) *braid* can be detected or, alternatively, between *cultural* and *political* public spheres.

Dissemination

From the very start, the Mayor, and later his closest party members, used the Diary to strategically disseminate information, typically by linking to Icelandic online media. In the beginning, the Mayor is personal in his communication, posting pictures from his holiday, contributing a large number of 'likes', and taking part in streams of comments. Later, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold the 'cultural' and the 'political' apart, a process that culminates in the following 13 November 2011 status update: 'Dear friends. I have operated three pages on Facebook for some time now. Apart from them, there are a few under my name that I have nothing to do with. To make things easier, I have established a new page, which will be my main page. This will still be a venue for news and announcements' (Mayor's Diary, 13.11.2011).

Indeed, from this update up to the present, the site has become more of a venue for dissemination of news, announcements, and snapshots from Gnarr's daily work as Mayor. However, even prior to this update, dissemination was a major form of communication on the site, often accompanied by the Mayor's own comments. Here, the Mayor takes advantage of Facebook's affordances to communicate strategically to his followers, repeatedly emphasizing his personal affinity with his fellow citizens. An example of such staging of discussions on Facebook is a link to an online version of an Icelandic newspaper, which shows a photo of the Mayor's bright red electronic Reva automobile next to the President of Iceland's more extravagant and authoritative Lexus. Here, the stream of comments is to the Mayor's advantage, as he is framed as down-to-earth, environmental, and alternative. Other examples include the search for 'this year's citizen of Reykjavik' (09.11.2011), which links to Reykjavik municipality's own page; a link to a favourable newspaper editorial (18.10.2010); a link to an article on Reykjavik becoming the literature capital of UNESCO, to which he comments 'Lots of joy. Congratulations!' (5.08.2011); and finally a link where he responds 'Great! More of this' (Mayor's Diary 12.10.2010) to a report stating that Iceland leads the World Economic Forum's gender equality rankings.

Generally, the topics of gender equality, peace, sustainability, human rights, and environmentalism, 'pocket philosophy', and humour are prominent among the Mayor's Facebook disseminations, often framed by informal phrasings that lie close to people and are communicated directly to people. This corresponds with the communicative techniques that the Best Party applied prior to the elections, which played upon elements of affection, humour, and the ridiculous.

It is, however, when this flow of everyday life is broken that the Mayor's communication gets fuzzy – when the subject at hand crosses the boundaries of cultural and political public spheres, the political and politics, as is the case with a link to an article on a transportation centre and the location of Reykjavik Airport. In response, the Mayor writes, 'Shouldn't we also ban all army flights passing through Reykjavik Airport. I want that' (Mayor's Diary 10.11.2010). The Mayor touches here on a much-debated issue within Icelandic municipal politics, and he immediately receives 114 comments that rather aggressively air the debate on anti-war philosophy, financial benefits, security, the interests of the city of Reykjavik relative to the rest of the country, etc. In one case, a comment is even directly confrontational, demanding a response from the Mayor. Yet here, as in other instances when confronted by a sensitive issue that travels constantly between affection and deliberation, the Mayor remains silent.

In terms of dissemination, what began as a vibrant function with many accompanying comments by the Mayor ended as more one-dimensional communication, primarily taking the form of direct links to the Best Party's official tasks, interviews with the Mayor in other media, etc. There are exceptions however, such as when the Mayor posted a YouTube link to Stevie Wonder's song 'Happy Birthday', accompanied by the following comment: 'Today, it has been two years since the Best Party and the Social Democratic Alliance majority took charge in Reykjavik!' (Mayor's Diary, 15.06.2012). In line with less activity on the site, this update generated few comments, of which many were negative, culminating in the phrase 'killers of democracy' being posted by a discontented user, with reference to the party's priorities within the educational sector. Indeed, this polarization of either being for or against is another distinct feature of

the communication taking place on the Mayor's Diary on Facebook – a process that is closely related to the *cultural/political* nature of the subject at hand and whether it is framed as *ritual* or as *theatre*.

Polarization

During the heyday of the Mayor's activities on Facebook, Gnarr communicates in an intimate tone, giving his Facebook followers insight into the life of a newcomer to municipal politics: 'This work day is finished. Look forward to facing the tasks ahead. Am not worried or scared, which is not self-evident. Believe in trust, hope, and love. Think that this is the right thing to do. But if that proves to be naïve bullshit, then I know that suspicion, despair, and anger can take over' (04.08.2010). The Mayor receives favourable or confirmatory comments to this where people appreciate the proximity and trust that Gnarr is transmitting. In the beginning, this works well for the Mayor as he deliberately diminishes the gap between the cultural and the political, pulling complex procedures and concepts down to a level to which 'common people' can relate: "Public administration" is the word of the day. I admit wholeheartedly that I only understand a fraction of this and often feel like Neo at the beginning of Matrix. Patience and humbleness. Everything is happening, but it happens slowly. Thanks for the support and the encouragement' (Mayor's Diary, 06.08.2010). Again, the 45 comments are positive, with people relating to the Mayor by, for instance, making fun of the elites operating behind Gnarr's ironic view of "public administration".

A few days later, the Mayor posts a similar update in which he claims to be naïve, that he is not up for the job, and that he cannot work with the opposition: 'I think I'm being humble, but even if I smile, I get nothing back but arrogance and lack of interest. Should I stop smiling too or keep trying to make friends with these people who do not respect me and what we are trying to accomplish? I'm going to sleep on this. Good night' (Mayor's Diary, 27.08.2010). Again, the 312 comments are positive and encouraging overall. People generally acknowledge the Mayor's sincerity and appreciate his openness. This can be detected in comments like 'Good night dear mayor!', 'Always smile !! But don't be respectful of someone who doesn't respect you. Make us proud!!', 'Never stop smiling dear mayor. You got elected because you are human and not a robot like all of the out-dated politicians', 'Sincerity. Isn't that what we need today?'

The response of the networked publics that emerge as a collective in this particular space demonstrates that the Mayor's communicative tactics were successful, at least while he still rode on the momentum of his performance in the election campaign. These networked publics relate to the values put forward by the Mayor, and they feel comfortable in engaging and participating in debates framed by the functionalities of Facebook and the issues put forward by him. The proximity and sincerity that serves as a precondition for these communicative acts works well for the Mayor as long as he can control the discussions in the cultural realm of the lifeworld. The Mayor thus plays upon the intersection of the private and the public, the cultural and the political, as the following example demonstrates. Here, he offers his followers insight into his struggle to give up smoking: 'Nicotine-free day 2. Visit to Höfðatorg and a meeting in Höfði. Dizziness, problems with sight, restlessness. Cold Turkey. Good night!' (Mayor's Diary 28.08.2010).

The Mayor thus provides insight into his life as an official, elected public servant as well as into the current condition of his mind and body. This is, furthermore, frequently formulated in a linguistically vivid manner. Or as Bakhtin would have it, the Mayor uses humour, the absurd, and the grotesque. However, the carnival is a temporary performance, and the networked publics communicating on the Mayor's Diary soon start creating polarizing communication patterns in which one is either for the Mayor or against him. This is particularly the case when the subject at hand is not, say, the Mayor's inner struggle with nicotine addiction but, rather, cuts in the educational system or the closing down of nursery schools.

During these first months of the Mayor's Diary, Gnarr keeps blurring the boundaries between the cultural and the political, constituting networked post-bourgeois hybrids in which matters that are traditionally dealt with by decision-taking strong publics merge with opinion formations amongst weak publics. In one and the same status update, Gnarr mixes meetings on financial issues, budget negotiations, a literature prize, an encounter with a foreign comedian, and a planned meeting with the Minister of Finance. He ends the update with the following words: 'I am very grateful to all who have told people off on this site for being rude' (Mayor's Diary, 28.09.2010). The following 67 comments demonstrate a polarization tendency that escalates later on the Mayor's Diary. The people who openly claim to have voted for him and are still content with his doings comment in an assertive fashion; 'Keep it up JG!:o)'. But increasingly, many comments express impatience, disappointment, and a sense of betrayal: 'Dear Jón...you should have realized that this venue would not just be positive. Many people are going through hardship...poverty. The city is letting these people down...especially poor people with children'; 'Shouldn't the Mayor think less of his ego participating in foreign media and focus on the tasks that have to do with the city and the people who live there'; 'It's strange if people want certain posts removed from the site and the Mayor is grateful for people criticizing people who criticize him. What happened to open and transparent politics? Everything on the table? Democratic debate? Is this just something used as propaganda before the elections?'

The Mayor increasingly falls prey to the polarization that he set out to avoid, particularly in his communication with people from the opposition. However, the response to such updates confirms this polarization in the political public sphere. Initially, the Best Party aimed to break away from old and obsolete discourses within the political public sphere, for instance by playing upon the friction between the cultural and the political. But as the party becomes institutionalized into pragmatic decision-taking in the political public sphere, it also becomes what it set out to fight.

Finally, the Mayor posts a very honest account of the current situation, which is directly linked to the financial crisis: 'Think it's terrible to cut back and rationalize. I did not engage in this because of my interest in this. These are tough times. I wish there were a simple and painless way. It is difficult to bring this message, but this is the current grave situation. But things will get better. We will make it through' (Mayor's Diary, 31.01.2011). The 181 comments are again divided into positive accounts, where it is maintained that the Mayor has done his best in light of the situation, and negative accounts that criticize the Mayor's priorities and express irritation at his double role as comedian and politician.

This polarization again works at the intersection of the cultural and the political realms. On the one hand, people are either affirmative or negative when it comes to the

framing of the Mayor as a passionate, affective, humorous, and irrational newcomer to the field, and on the other hand, people are either affirmative or negative when it comes to the Mayor's achievements as a major actor within the political public spheres, his priorities, and concrete results. The two, however, cannot be separated. Indeed, they are post-bourgeois hybrids. The paradox is that the Best Party is accused of not talking to people, of betrayal in terms of its rationalization of music education and elementary schools, of prioritizing elites and betraying the 'normal citizen'.

The affective communicative tactics they were so successful in 'selling' prior to the election work best when staged as a *performance* or as *theatrical entertainment*. It is when the *performance* gets tiring and the *efficacy* of the *ritual* kicks in that the party begins feeling the heat – a process clearly evident in the responses generated by networked publics on the Mayor's Diary.

The Efficacy-entertainment Braid

As mentioned above, Gnarr is initially active and responsive in his communication on the Mayor's Diary. He is especially successful when framing his communication as entertainment, and in this context, videos and pictures serve his purpose well. A good example of this is when he succeeds in combining performance with multimodal and multichannel communications on the Internet, usually on Facebook and YouTube. Events like Gay Pride serve this purpose well, allowing him to dress up as a woman and address the event. The photo of this event that he posted on the Mayor's Diary (06.08.2010) generated 127 comments (1,035 likes): 'The coolest mayor in the world!', 'I love my mayor', 'It's fun to get a mayor who participates in the life of the public and doesn't hide behind closed doors all day. Bravo to you, and I hope you continue this'.

He is equally successful in a 'Merry Christmas' video in which he performs in the guise of Darth Vader, commenting on dogs and cats, and posting photos of himself with the official symbol of Reykjavik tattooed on his arm. This last example represented a succession of pictures, beginning with the actual tattooing process, continuing with a photo in which the Mayor presents the tattoo and posts 'out of respect for my city and its residents' (Mayor's Diary, 05.10.2010), and culminating in a photo of the Mayor in the hospital as a result of an infection caused by the tattoo. These three pictures generated approximately 600 comments, largely composed of positive exclamations involving coolness, fun, love, and genius as well as cheerful wishes for a speedy recovery.

In these cases, it is Gnarr who is in charge as a performer using similar communicative means as he did during the election campaign and playing deliberately upon Schechner's account of theatrical entertainment. The focus here is on the affective and the fun: It is a performance that the performer is in charge of and that the audience watches and appreciates. This can be seen in the responses generated by the networked publics that emerge for each of these updates on the Mayor's Diary. However, as soon as Gnarr leaves his comfort zone of theatrical entertainment, as with an update concerning whether or not to spend money on fireworks during the Culture Night festival, he receives 691 comments that pull him onto the other end of the braid – the one where he becomes entangled in the results-based efficacy, where collective creativity emerges on account of the individual creativity of theatrical entertainment. Here, the networked publics communicating through Facebook's reply system are divided regarding the necessity of

having fireworks. They express a range of opinions, invest time and effort to engage and participate. But to no avail. The Mayor is silent, and the participants are disempowered. Indeed, at the end of this vast stream of comments, one citizen reveals that it has already been decided to go ahead with the fireworks (Mayor's Diary, 09.08.2010).

In this context, it is important to mention that these acts are framed, performed, and posted on Facebook during the first seven months of Gnarr's official term as mayor. He is, in other words, still riding the tide of the election campaign. However, as with other activities on the Mayor's Diary, these diminish as time passes, and when they occur, as for instance during Gay Pride 2012, at which Gnarr performs in the guise of a Pussy Riot member, the response is neither as vast nor as affirmative as it had been earlier. Indeed, one of the comments quite accurately describes this tension between the cultural and political public spheres, the political and politics, weak and strong publics: 'It's great that he demonstrates support for Gay Pride, but he could also support other domains but he's afraid of that, because that would call for expenses from the City. It's better to find a cause that doesn't demand money, only justice' (Mayor's Diary, 11.08.2012).

Conclusion

At first, the Best Party, and in particular the Mayor Jón Gnarr, managed to adapt its communicative tactics from the election campaign to the Mayor's Diary on Facebook. The Mayor did this by playing strategically upon the multimodal and multichannel characteristics of the Internet, galvanizing networked publics to generate processes of mass self-communication. In this case, Facebook provided the necessary space in which an imagined collective could emerge at the intersection of people, technology, and practice. It is not, however, the space itself that generates communication, but instead the engagement of people, and from this perspective, the Best Party was extremely successful in relating the affective, passionate, irrational, and humorous elements of daily life practices that reside within the cultural realm of the lifeworld. By galvanizing people's civic agency through subversive discourses of the carnival, the party 'performed democracy', thereby creating post-bourgeois hybrids that momentarily reversed traditional flows between weak and strong publics, cultural and political public spheres.

Later, when the moment of the feast had passed and reality kicked in, the party struggled to find balance in its strenuous efforts to achieve equilibrium between affection and deliberation. This is clear in the communications taking place when citizens act like networked publics on the Mayor's Diary, publics that no longer wish to settle for theatrical affective entertainment, but also demand the result-based rituals of rational-critical decision-taking within the political public sphere. Indeed, when the communications on the Mayor's Diary are scrutinized from the perspective of *dissemination*, *polarization* and the Mayor's efforts to achieve balance on the *efficacy (ritual) – entertainment (theatre) braid*, it is clear that the temporality of the performance and the party's emphasis on galvanizing civic agency from the cultural realm turned out not to be viable when the party went from opinion formation to decision-taking.

This is evident in the transformation undergone through the dialogical communication generated by the Mayor as well as in the textual, discourse, and social practice of the communication generated by the networked publics. At first, the Mayor is responsive and sticks close to communicative tactics that frame him and the party on the premise

of theatrical entertainment. They attempt to prolong the lifespan of the carnival and build a bridge from the opinion-forming publics in the cultural public spheres to the decision-taking processes within the political public spheres. The Mayor grows more silent over time, and the Mayor's Diary becomes more and more a unidirectional dissemination platform.

Facebook as a media environment is a restricted communicative space that sets severe limitations on the networked publics that emerge within its space. Gnarr, however, initially managed to 'tame' its functionalities in order to frame his performances – a tactic that initially worked well while the communication concerned issues that traditionally belong to the cultural public spheres. They failed only when the political became politics, when the cultural became political, or better still, when the party attempted to create post-bourgeois hybrids of *agonistic pluralism*. Indeed, the party's communication on Facebook succumbed to democracy as it simply could not find a means of channelling its celebrated subversive discourses into deliberation in the political sphere. Elements of the subversive, passions, the affective, and the ridiculous certainly remain a key element in the party's communication on the Mayor's Diary, yet the question remains, as Mouffe anticipates, as to whether these are favourable to the promotion of democratic designs when the feast is over.

For Gnarr, it turned out that the official, political burden and institutionalization of the Mayor's Diary on Facebook ended up by conditioning his performative communicative techniques. This is, as previously noted, the reason why the Diary increasingly became a venue for dissemination for the Best Party, as a political party, clearly grounded within the strong publics of opinion formation and decision-taking. Indeed, four years later, the Party has now morphed into another larger political party called Bright Future, which is not limited to Reykjavik municipality politics. Gnarr himself did not aim for re-election and Bright Future has taken over the Mayor's Diary on Facebook. Indeed, four years later, there is a new election – a new feast. However, this time, without the clown who has withdrawn from the result-based, deliberative sphere of political rituals, only to emerge again in the affective, cultural spheres of entertainment.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984) *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- boyd, danah (2011) Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and implications. In *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* ed. Z. Papacharissi, 39-58. New York & London: Routledge.
- Brouwer, Daniel (2006) Communication as counterpublics. In *Communication as...: Perspectives on theory* eds. Gregory Shepard, Jeffrey St. John & Ted Striphas, 195-208. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Castells, Manuel (2009) *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dahlberg, Lincoln (2007) The internet, deliberative democracy, and power: Radicalizing the public sphere. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 3(1), 47-64.
- Fairclough, Norman (1992) *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, Norman (2003) *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Fraser, Nancy (1992) Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In *Habermas and the public sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun, 109-142. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Gripsrud, Jostein & Moe, Hallvard (2010) Introduction. In *The digital public sphere: Challenges for media policy* eds. Jostein Gripsrud & Hallvard Moe, 9-19. Göteborg: NORDICOM.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1987) *The theory of communicative action – volume 2: Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Habermas, Jürgen (1989) *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996) *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hartley, John & Green, Joshua (2006) The public sphere on the beach. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(3), 341-362.
- Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang & Shannon, Sarah (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research* 15, 1277-1288.
- Mayor's Diary on Facebook (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/dagbok.borgarstjora?ref=ts&fref=ts> 31 January 2014.
- Mayring, Philipp (2000) Qualitative content analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2), art. 20.
- McGuigan, Jim (2005) The cultural public sphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8(4), 427-443.
- Mouffe, C Chantal (1999) Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social Research*, 66(3), 745-758.
- Mouffe, Chantal (2005) *On the political*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Schechner, Richard (2003) *Performance Theory*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Valtysson, Bjarki (2010) Access culture: Web 2.0 and cultural participation. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 16(2), 200-214.
- Warner, Michael (2002) *Publics and counterpublics*. Cambridge: MIT Press.