

"Governmentality" workshop
HWK, December 2006

Knowledge consumerism - Regulating the freedom of choice

Per-Anders Forstorp
School of Computer Science and Communication
KTH (Royal Institute of Technology)
Stockholm, Sweden
forstorp@kth.se

The political rationality associated with liberalism and neo-liberalism can be analyzed through the "people technologies" with which the ideals of these rationalities have been put into practice. A focus on these technologies of political practice includes understanding how the liberal citizen is brought into being in the first place, in social spheres such as the school, welfare, insurance, self-esteem movements and democracy. Studies in the tradition of "governmentality", drawing on theories of power and the creation of subjects, have to a lesser extent focused on the socio-cultural spheres, such as the media, although the public sphere seem to be a premier example of how technologies of citizenship are enacted in contemporary society (cf. Miller, Hay).

Governing in liberal democracies takes place not only through the power of the state or violence but through securing voluntary compliance from citizens. Technologies of citizenship in various participatory and democratic schemes are designed to promote the subject's autonomy, self-sufficiency, empowerment and freedom of choice. The assumption is just like in the idea of the free market, that there is no governance taking place, but that the subject is making the choice, the decision, the vote. In high regard is what we could call "viewer value" or "participant value" as a democratic counterpart to "stakeholder value". Participatory activities such as these rests upon the capacity to act as a certain kind of citizen, and this citizen have to be produced; he/she is not there in the first place. The technologies of citizenship are a measure of our subjection rather than of our autonomy from power. It is both voluntary and coercive

In this paper I will argue that particularly in the period of de-regulation the media have been operative in producing citizens through technologies of citizenship. Today, "people technologies" are increasingly implemented and operated through new media such as the Internet. Given the intensified coupling of new media and politics this is yet another perspective on the power of the media, and how this power works by producing citizens who can choose. And choices we make; between channels, agendas, ads, candidates in reality-TV and in televised-reality, etc. I will draw on a body of work in sociology and political theory (Rose, Cruikshank, Dean and others) and try to fit this critical thinking into the realm of the media (Miller, Hay).

The special focus in this contribution to the HWK workshop will be to unpack the notion of "knowledge" inherent in these new media regimes. New media and new organizational structures are often legitimated as parts of the general assumption that we are moving into a "knowledge society". The thesis of knowledge society is a widespread

framework in contemporary societies, where the fate of knowing and learning is affected in a particular way that supports the decentralization of expertise and responsibility to choose to the individual citizen. With examples taken from contemporary eGovernment in Scandinavia, I will analyze the twin processes of instrumentalization of knowledge and individualization of responsibility. My general argument is that this process strongly enforces what we instead of a “knowledge society” could call “knowledge consumerism”.

Per-Anders Forstorp
Associate professor
School of Computer Science and Communication
KTH (Royal Institute of Technology)
Stockholm, Sweden
forstorp@kth.se

short c v

born 1954
PhD Department of Communication studies at Linköping University, Sweden 1992
Postdoc at Department of Anthropology, UCLA 1994
Researcher at Linköping University 1995-1997
Lecturer at Linköping University (Campus Norrköping) 1997-1999
Senior lecturer at the Royal Institute of Technology, 1999 –
2003-2004 American Scandinavian Foundation visiting professor at the Department of
Communication studies, University of Iowa, 2003-2004
Project leader for a grant from the Swedish Research Council on “The forms and
content of cross-boundary learning”, 2004-2007

Recent publications

2006 “Quantifying automobility – speed, ‘zero tolerance’ and democracy”, in Böhm,
Steffen, Campbell Jones, Chris Land & Matthew Paterson (eds.) *Against Automobility:
Representation, Subjectivity, Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell

2006 “The construction of pseudo-science: Science patrolling and knowledge policing by
academic prefects and weeders”, in *VEST Journal of Science and Technology Studies*

2006 *George W. Reinfeldt. Konsten att göra en politisk extreme makeover*. Stockholm: Karneval
 (“George W Reinfeldt. The Art of Making a Political Extreme Makeover”), with Brian
Palmer