

Scott Kushner
Department of Romance Studies
Duke University

Meet the Bloggers: Investigating the Cultural Specificity of Political Blogging

Mark Poster has described the Internet as “underdetermined,” declaring that it creates a self-contained universe, like broadcast media, but that it also invites the subject or user to participate fully in the unending work of creation. If the difference between old print media and new electronic media is that the former gestures beyond itself and points out at some external represented referent while the latter points in, exclusively and unyieldingly creating an internal reality, then the interactive, virtual medium of the Internet draws the external subject into the self-referential space, insisting that he or she participate in the acts of creation and determination.

The political blogosphere poses a particular challenge to this understanding of the Internet. The project of political blogs is to create a virtual space where geographically non-contiguous actors can develop, practice and deploy political discourses with the intent of effecting change in the external political and social spheres. They seek at once to point in at themselves and to point out beyond themselves, to be creational and representational media, to draw the subject in and push the subject out, to mobilize the created, detached, underdetermined virtual space in order to effect change in experienced external reality.

Further complicating the matter is that different blogospheres, and different parts of blogospheres, function differently. Using the French and American political blogospheres as reference points, this paper will tease out the structures and functionalities that undergird the complicated relationship between virtual and non-virtual spaces. By placing the two national models in relief, a clearer picture can emerge of how culturally specific social and political practices constrain the blogosphere’s claims to universalism. Despite the Internet’s promise of unfettered freedom, equality and interconnectivity, this can serve as a reminder that users arrive in cyberspace equipped with fully-functional cultural and social apparatuses and their practices and conceptions of the possibilities of networked culture are colored by their non-virtual existences.