

In this paper, I shed critical light on the sociopolitical potential of a free video-sharing website, www.YouTube.com (hereafter, UT) which demands much attention from critical pedagogy practitioners who aim for democratic social transformation. One historic importance of the 2008 U.S. presidential election is that UT played a major role not only as a strategic means of information distribution for the Obama campaign, but also as a means for ordinary people's tactical responsiveness to mobilize and organize other uncommitted voters by distributing self-made videos. With UT's phenomenal popularity and impact, the campaign helped to reinvent the meaning of democratic polity not as a patronizing model of top-down elitism but as a grassroots model of mutual self-organization and collective governance. With UT, ordinary people have become producers of media spectacles that can have broader sociopolitical repercussions and gain major attention from traditional media outlets. Their civic-minded and politically conscious utilization of UT has facilitated the implementation of the transformative politics of technology in which technology can be employed as a tool of social change. Likewise, one thing we can learn from the 2008 election is that ordinary people can be more active constituencies of participatory democracy when they are "increasingly bringing Web 2.0 to political activism, developing new watchdog tools that open up congressional machinery for ordinary citizens to scrutinize and critique" (Caplan, 2008). Therefore it is an important practical question how critical pedagogy¹ should take advantage of UT in order to construct alternative Internet culture and, in turn, to promote values of human agency, grassroots democracy, and sociopolitical reconstruction.

In UT's relatively early stage of development in January, 2007, a user, [Zakgeorge21](#), posted his own video clip to initiate a thought-provoking discussion about the future of UT. Recognizing UT's phenomenal popularity and potential, he asked, "Why do you tube? Why do you make a video for UT?" which made fellow UTers think about their motives and purposes for UTing. Considering that there is ambivalence toward UT's concrete impact on society depending on each user's specific objectives, these discursive questions are deemed to ask fellow UTers for a way to implement the technology for a better future for mankind. With a tone of utopian/technophilic perspective in which he equates technological developments with historical/social progress, [Zakgeorge21](#) (2007) encourages other users to discuss possible ways to make alternative uses of UT because he believes it "is a really cool place for serious changes to happen throughout the world" depending on how individuals make creative, critical uses of it. As Feenberg (2002) necessitates a "radical philosophy of technology" which demands ordinary people's active intervention in technology's social application as well as its redesign for a more egalitarian purpose, [Zakgeorge21](#) also invites fellow UTers to discuss how they can realize UT's undetermined, yet-to-be-realized, sociopolitical potential with their civic-minded uses. In this respect, his

discursive topic on a dialectic relationship between UT's social impact and individuals' concrete utilization of it transforms UT from an entertainment playhouse to a communal forum of a philosophy of UT uses. Thus, it is significant to examine his initial questions with other users' discursive responses because they serve as a parameter which shows the potential as well as the limitations of UT uses considering his questions: "What do you think the implications of UT are? What can be beneficial about it?" From this point of view, this paper examines how ordinary UT users participate in an online video discussion forum, and how they perceive its further potential when applied for a more civic-minded purpose.

YouTube and the Democratization of Media Spectacles

Among other things, video communication makes UT distinctive from other online discussion forums which are mainly based on, but not necessarily confined to, texts. Considering a more comprehensive effect of multi-modal communication, individuals' video postings on UT demand a revision of a commonly held belief in media spectacles, which have mainly been utilized by the dominant class in society. Critical media/ cultural studies scholars have investigated that corporate media spectacles play a major role to (re)produce the dominant hegemony of society (Debord, 1967; Goldfarb, 2002; Kellner, 1995, 2003, 2005). In the 2008 election, Kellner (2008) sketches big moments of the election in terms of corporate media spectacles' incorporations of the dominant hegemony. Throughout the campaign trail, there were many spectacular moments which were (re)produced by corporate media outlets, such as the use of the phrase "lipstick on a pig," which drew criticism for Obama as an alleged disparagement of his opponent's gender.² However, more importantly, there was a qualitatively different moment of media spectacles' sociopolitical impacts, which can be seen in the phenomenal success of grassroots media spectacles created by ordinary people on UT. In this regard, it demands a serious reconsideration of media spectacles in the age of UT.

An important contribution of UT in terms of the sociopolitical roles of media spectacles is that it implements the democratization of media spectacles. Exceptional success of alternative media spectacles such as "*Yes, We Can*" and "*We are the Ones*" music videos for the Obama campaign symbolizes a transformative power of media spectacles which was created by non-corporate media industries.³ What is more, ordinary people exerted an unprecedented sociopolitical power by producing grassroots media spectacles on UT as a means of organizing and mobilizing potential supporters in the 2008 election.⁴ Thus, with UT's contribution to the democratization of media spectacles, Debord's (1967) project of transformative appropriation of media spectacles for social

justice should be reevaluated with its practical probability as a social movement mobilizer.

UT's contribution to the democratization of media spectacles further provides an innovative perspective on the Internet's potential for direct democracy with broader cultural, educational, and sociopolitical implications.⁵ In other words, UT brings individuals opportunities to become active participants in the construction of alternative culture and to promote values of human agency, grassroots democracy, and social reconstruction. In this respect, this paper intends to encourage critical pedagogy practitioners to actively engage in new media technologies like UT to take advantage of innovative "tactical responses in the margin of maneuver of the dominated" in the age of new media (Feenberg, 2002, p. 87). Because critical pedagogy aims to equip individuals with opportunities to expose, develop, and realize their potential through "participating in the pursuit of liberation" (Freire, 1970, p. 169), tactical maneuvers of UT will provide critical pedagogy with a good amount of theoretical elaboration with practical competencies that the dominated exercise transformative power of their participation in the cultural politics of media spectacles. It should also be accompanied with an acute analysis of cultural, ideological, and sociopolitical contexts of new media technologies. Therefore, it is timely and significant to examine how UT users responded to [Zakgeorge21](#)'s initial question not because it was the first grassroots, democratic discursive question initiated by an ordinary UTer, but also because it is imbued with important pedagogic implications which help critical pedagogy practitioners to incorporate UT in their educational settings. Administering textual analysis of UT users' arguments on video responses, this paper examines the strength and potential, as well as the weakness and limitations, of their discourses on UT, and appraises the sociopolitical potential of them.

The UT Phenomenon and Its Sociopolitical Impacts

UT has been incredibly successful in its growth and popularity since its inception in February, 2005. *Time* magazine named UT the "Best Invention of 2006." Grossman (2006) describes its colossal impact: "One year ago, this would not have been possible, but the world has changed.... thousands of ordinary people have become famous. Famous people have been embarrassed.... one website changed them: YouTube."

As a popular medium, UT has entailed cultural changes in society. Internet celebrity is one of the most salient cultural effects of it. Ordinary people can attract tremendous attention from others around the globe. For example, a user in his 80s known as [Geriatric1927](#) has become No. 6 on UT's list of "Most Subscribed Directors of All Time" and is enjoying his late-life fame. Another

user, [Brookers](#), has enjoyed UT fandom and signed a contract with the mainstream media group, Carson Daly Productions “to help create and act in programs for television, the Internet, and portable devices” (Hardy, 2006). UT has further circulated the media contents from such conventional broadcasting companies as NBC, CBS, and Fox to increase their viewership; recently, the BBC announced a deal to post its video clips on UT. BBC said the pact was a “part of the BBC’s strategic move into multimedia methods of delivering news and entertainment to audiences across the globe” (Millard, 2007). As an experimental project, an orchestra utilizes UT as an auditioning means.⁶ Based on a four-minute piece by the composer of YouTube Symphony Orchestra summit, Tan Dum, UT users record their performances and upload them on UT and then judges decide finalists, who play at Carnegie Hall in April, 2009.

UT has broader social and educational impacts. Several police departments are using UT to help crime investigations. In Massachusetts, Brian Johnson, a patrolman, was able to identify criminal suspects by circulating a surveillance video clip on UT (Tucker, 2007). Other police departments have used UT in criminal investigations in Florida, Rhode Island, and California. Universities have provided virtually any audiences at any time with their lectures by posting online versions on UT.⁷ Moreover, students increasingly depend on UT as a reference tool for their assignment research. As of November, 2008, People made 2.8 billion searches on UT, that is, about 200 million more than on Yahoo, which is the second most popular search engine (Helft, 2009a).

Politicians started to employ UT as a strategy to approach undecided and disinterested young voters in the 2008 election. An outstanding increase of Internet uses indicates a significant role of UT videos as a venue of campaign advertisements for the campaigns. Compared to 10% of Americans who consulted the Internet for political news during the entire 2004 campaign season, 33% have already depended on the Internet for campaign-related information for the 2008 election as of October, 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2008). What is more, 35% of adult Web users watched some form of political online video as of June 15, 2008 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008). Specifically, “more than 146 million people watched an average of 86 videos” during September, 2008 (Eisenberg, 2008). With this pervasive Internet presence and an uprising of UT’s share of political/campaign communication, 7 out of 16 potential presidential candidates announced their races for their party’s nomination on UT. Most of them created their accounts, [You Choose '08](#), on UT. What is more, by producing UT videos, ordinary UTers had chances to address their political concerns to parties’ nomination candidates. In turn, eight Democratic candidates and eight Republican candidates answered voters’ questions in UT video clips hosted by CNN/UT on July 23, 2007 and November 28, 2007, respectively.⁸

Among other things in the 2008 election, the Obama phenomenon is a major indicator of the complex interconnections between UT, alternative media spectacles, and grassroots political participation. To be sure, a main dynamic of Obama's election as the Democratic Party's candidate and the 44th president of the United States was the variety of online multimedia materials produced by ordinary people, which boosted the number of small donations and the amount of grassroots participation. Seeing that ordinary, underrepresented people utilize UT to publicize self-made videos as an innovative platform for grassroots political mobilization, and how they project their personal narratives in order to inspire and consolidate potential Obama supporters, it is very important to examine how UT exerts unprecedented sociopolitical impacts in society.⁹

However, though there were outstanding performances of UT videos in the 2008 election, one can not claim UT's remarkable performances as a true "story of the business of the future [because] it's too strange a place and too uncertain a profit model to inspire copycats" (Heffernan, 2008). Therefore, it is an important instructional issue in which critical pedagogy has to deliberate necessary interventions to maximize UT's contribution to the democratization of media spectacles as a means of grassroots political participation by extensive uses of new media technologies.

Artifactual Study of Media Spectacles on YouTube

By March 5, 2007, there were 700,183 UT users who had watched [Zakgeorge21](#)'s video posting; there were 4,062 text comments and 80 video responses after his initial video post on January 9, 2007. The initial video was originally identified in January, 2007 when it was selected for UT's "Featured Videos" category, which includes "select user videos that are currently popular or ... showcased in [Spotlight Videos](#)" (YouTube, 2009). It means that the UT community considered the video to be interesting and to contain timely, significant content. Among a total of 80 videos under the category of "Response Videos" to [Zakgeorge21](#)'s video, I find only 20 videos are appropriate for this study because not all video responses are discursively deliberate, or on the topic. In other words, there are many subjectively unrelated videos to the topic of the video discussion forum, such as music videos and footages of animal behaviors, which only aim to promote their popularity in terms of hit-numbers. After a series of textual analyses of the selected videos, I acknowledge that only 14 discussants make meaningful comments on the sociopolitical potential and impact of UT. Thus, comparing to existing literature on the Internet's broad impacts, this paper critically investigates how these 14 UTERS consider what the future of UT would be.

Because video posting and video response are very unique features of UT, making it unlike other Internet discussion forums, conducting textual analysis of these UT videos is particularly meaningful as a way of investigating media artifacts which enable a unique examination of human behavior on the Internet. Thus, doing textual analysis of UT videos enables researchers to investigate appearance as well as placement of certain media artifacts which imply a collective meaning of society's cultural and political contexts (McKee, 2001). In this way, we also take advantage of what Thomas (1994) calls an "indirect" examination of human behavior on the Internet which "may be *interpreted as reflecting* [meaning-making-and-subsequent-application] processes" (p. 685, emphasis original).

Concerning researchers' interpretation as a major source of textual analysis, it does not solely rely on a rigid reading of media artifacts' "encoded" manifest meanings as authorial intents, but also it examines their latent meanings which can be grasped by researchers'/audiences' subjective "decoding" (Hall, 1980). In this respect, my interpretation of the selected UT videos aims to understand how ordinary users practice the discursive potential of making online videos in terms of democratization of media spectacles.

It is pedagogically significant to analyze these video responses because they show the potential of the Internet as a public sphere in which ordinary people can participate in grassroots discursive practices on the issues of their own interests. In other words, this discursive moment, which was created by ordinary users to discuss the future of UT, hints at the potential of reviving Habermas's public sphere in which ordinary people realize autonomous human agency by participating in free, autonomous discussions.

The Internet as Contested Sphere and Its Forms of Use

In general, there are two approaches to the new media technologies: the utopian/technophilic perspective and the dystopian/technophobic one. The main feature of the utopian/technophilic approach is that it deals with the benefits of information and communication technology (ICT); in this view, ICT is believed to empower individuals and efficiently facilitate sociopolitical participation (Flatley, 2005; Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004; Rheingold, 1993; Ridell, 2002). Long before the Internet was in active use, Hollander (1985) articulated its potential:

The new technology makes direct democracy possible, indeed probable....What is proposed here is to merge the spirit of ancient Athens with the technologies of the twenty-first century - Pericles with digital transmission. *Direct democracy* can and should have a rebirth. (p. 3, emphasis added)

Decentralized communication, a participatory model, and maximum information flow are the main components that make a more democratic society probable under the aegis of ICTs. During the 2008 election campaign, candidates' websites and independent blogs played an important role in organizing and mobilizing supporters as well as providing a substantial amount of news and information (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008).

With regard to ICT's probability of reviving direct democracy, Habermas's (1989) notion of the "public sphere" is the most celebrated concept. A democracy is a "direct democracy" when the ideal notion of the public sphere is realized with individuals' autonomous participation in discussions of their own interests as well as by undistorted communication among discussion constituencies. Grounded in an ideal of "communicative rationality" which is based on mutual understanding and persuasion,¹⁰ Habermas believes that individuals should strive for personal autonomy and to exchange their ideas openly and reach consensus in the "universal speech situation" of the public sphere, in which there is no domination or manipulation and the force of the better argument prevails. Individuals can exercise mutual pedagogy practices when the ideal notion of the public sphere is realized. Thus, they get closer to the ideal of grassroots democracy and self-governance. In other words, interactive and decentralized communication on the Internet can invigorate the democratic decision-making of the "public sphere" with individuals' active participation in its "universal speech situation" leading to participatory democracy (Heng & de Moor, 2003). However, Habermas's notion of the public sphere is strictly confined to the bourgeois model of liberal capitalism, which does not explain social problems caused by class conflicts, the public fragmented by competing interests, and the massive intervention of governments and corporations into social formation of public opinion (Fraser, 1992). Even though Habermas's claim on the "public sphere" is utopian without considering the "digital divide" among class, gender, and race, it is still a powerful concept with which to examine the Internet's potential.

In contrast, the dystopian/technophobic perspective focuses on the immense colonization of the new media which serves a profit model of technocapitalism with high mobilization of speculative capital throughout the globe. In this point of view, the Internet has not revitalized the "public sphere," but rather has been dominated by the voracious interests of neoliberal capitalism (Brown, 1997; McChesney, 2002; Wilhelm, 2000). Seen in the global financial crisis of September, 2008, ICTs are the nub of the global financial speculation that is a powerhouse of transnational corporations. Under this analysis, it is not "universal speech situation" of the public sphere which promotes individuals' autonomous participation in the sociopolitical and pedagogical arena, but commodification and commercialization, with which dominant social entities such as multinational

corporations increasingly fortify their hegemony, which are the current trends of the Internet.¹¹ Promoting “direct points of sale” as one example, the interactive communication of the Internet serves the marketing strategies of corporations (Dawson & Bellamy, 1996). Technology in this view provides individuals with limited or fragmented information in order to market corporations’ commodities. In sum, discourse and information on the Internet are controlled not by individuals but by capital (Dahlberg, 1998).

Rather than a theoretical impasse between two extreme schools, it is important to focus on a more practical dimension in which people vigorously utilize ICTs for many different causes in their everyday lives. Regardless of whether the Internet provides us with the transformative potential for a better world or the complete domination by capital, people have been using the Internet for their own purposes and the Internet has contributed to their lives (McMillan & Morrison, 2006). This usage is not the same as the formal public sphere envisioned by Habermas or the overwhelming colonization of the Internet described by McChesney (2002) and others. With Feenberg’s (2002) notion of “ambivalence of technology,” it is more important to examine how the Internet can be used for more desirable sociopolitical causes rather than just to point the finger at the Internet. In this regard, it is significant to consider a prospective epistemological orientation for dealing with the rising importance of Internet phenomenon:

Reorient your research lenses from attentions of textual presences on the Internet to attentions of networks of people and power; from questions of *what* constitutes power in the realm of machines to questions of *how* power is constituted in networks of human activity. (Werbin, 2005, p. 65, emphasis original)

In other words, “practical questions of how” individuals tend to employ the vast potential of the Internet will yield more contextualized, appropriate understanding of the specific impacts of the technology. Therefore, this study strives to conceptualize how individual UTers appropriate the Internet technology to engage discursive topics not only consuming others’ video postings but also producing their own; consequently, it tries to understand how UT offers different pedagogical as well as sociopolitical situations in which individuals participate. Interactions among the Internet’s technological structure, sociopolitical conditions, and individuals’ forms of uses should be the center of research that aims to examine the democratic potential of the Internet. In sum, this study focuses on individuals’ actual uses of UT rather than on its impact on the users.

As an individual’s use of the Internet depends on his or her socioeconomic status (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005), it is the very effect of individuals’ concrete uses based on different motives and purposes that determine what kinds of impacts the technology has. The Internet’s “open protocol network and the

open-source software” have become democratic by individuals’ massive “information sharing, horizontal communication, many-to-many discussions and fully interactive information generation” as the Internet’s common “*forms of use*” (Salter, 2004, p. 190, emphasis added). In this respect, [Zakgeorge21](#)’s discursive video posting is an exemplar of the proactive form of the Internet use, because it brings up an important discussion about how users contribute to UT’s future, going beyond simply using the given technology. Raising a reflective question about emancipatory forms of UT uses as a unique opportunity to make it a deliberately democratic medium, he invites other users to participate in a public sphere of UT. In this respect, it provides critical pedagogy with an important instructional question about UT’s role as a means of sociopolitical empowerment for the marginalized. Thus, I aim to contribute to the importance of pedagogical intervention to promote egalitarian, transformative motivation, and purpose of UTing.

YouTube: Technological Wonder and Democratic Potential of the Internet

The majority of users celebrate the innovative video-sharing technology of UT. [Zakgeorge21](#)’s (2007) initial question itself lauds its technological wonder: “Technology is the closest thing to magic so that’s why we as human beings are so fascinated by it.” In general, users evaluate UT as a qualitatively different website in that it represents the convergence of TV and the Internet; videos combined with Internet’s high interactivity expedite users’ engagement in the discussion forum. When TV, which has been the most influential mass medium, is radically democratized with the highly interactive communication of the Internet, an unchallenged hegemony of corporate media spectacles becomes a subject of question and creative reconstruction. Considering a close connection between the status quo and corporate media spectacles, the potential of UT can magnify a democratization of media spectacles which gets close to the ideal of a more open, diverse society. From this point of view, among many commentators, a user known as [NenoBrasil](#) (2007) succinctly evaluates UT as the “beginning of the new kind of society; this site is changing the way people communicate and entertain themselves.”

Compared to other communication modes, the visual is highly powerful in its communicative competence. As the cliché goes, seeing is believing. In his question, [Zakgeorge21](#) (2007) asserts the communicative power of the visual in UT videos: “Seconds of video you watch is just like reading thousand words.” [Dmbertolami](#) (2007) agrees with this point: “Text is very vague; however, video is very to the point.” Not only is it as an efficient carrier of messages, but the visual also proliferates collaboration and shared belief among individuals (Gergle, Kraut, & Fussell, 2004). As a major benefit of communicating by UT videos, the

users evaluate a proliferation of intercultural and international communication. From this point of view, [Xanthius](#) (2007) asserts that UT videos facilitate a person's comprehension and acceptance of different cultures: "UT has created a milestone for so many possibilities for the Internet; in particular, context, visual abilities through saying to other people throughout the world." Moreover, combined with strong motivations, the visual promotes people's interaction with other communication entities forming intercultural and international communities online. Considering that the Internet has promoted virtual communities of diasporas in the U.S. (Mitra, 2002), experiencing a kind of face-to-face communication through the use of UT videos which increases proximity and intimacy among users should be a better method of intercultural and international communication. [PublicAutopsy](#) (2007) clearly echoes Mitra's view: UT has "already revolutionized the Internet by breaking down any border of race or religion we would have between each other. UT is creating a borderless community where everyone can share what they feel with video, not just text." Furthermore, [NenoBrasil](#) (2007) assumes that a virtual UT community will have broader practical impact: "I think the relationship will not ever be the same after UT. It is a tool that allows us to meet people all around the world, and share our thoughts, problems, happiness, beliefs and everything."

Not only do UTERS enjoy being in a virtual community, but they also want to develop UT into a more democratic and communal space. [NicholasPickolas](#) (2007) says, "I don't want to see hatred in the community. The first step, if you want to make community great, is to take a stance against hating." It suggests that UTERS exercise the notion of participatory democracy, that they are active agents of self-governance with mutual collaboration amongst themselves.

A more open, diverse condition of media spectacles envisages an updated version of Habermas's public sphere on the Internet. The decentralized, interactive, and participatory communications of the Internet are beneficial in fulfilling the public sphere with people's active engagement in the cultural politics of media representations on UT. With an increasing impact of media spectacles, UT can be a battlefield in Gramsci's (1971) "war of position" in which subaltern groups can get their own voices against the dominant hegemony of society. In other words, ordinary people can get their own voice in a form of grassroots media spectacles which can contest a certain ideology such as racism, sexism, and so on. While Habermas (1989) emphasizes the importance of communicative rationality to reach mutual consensus among discussion participants, his model of the public sphere is limited to bourgeois European males, excluding others' access to it. However, participants of UT's video form of public forum are far more diversified because of the Internet's ubiquity and people's active uses of it. According to Pew Internet & American Life Project's national survey in March, 2003, more than 53 million American adults who

consist of 44% of the nation's Internet users published their thoughts in multimedia forms online (Lenhart, Horrigan, & Fallows, 2004). Moreover, considering that 94% of teenagers daily log in on the Internet and given their massive involvement in online activities such as social networking (58%), contents creation (64%), and contents remix (26%; Rainie, 2008), the conventional problem of digital divide is decreasing, though not solved entirely. Thus, the importance of critical pedagogy's intervention in individuals' uses of UT for a more egalitarian society is particularly conspicuous. In the discussion forum, protesting against conformity of identity and appearances, a user known as [Endhatefools](#) (2007), who camouflages himself with sunglasses and a hood, addresses the potential of the Internet to expand the realm of the public sphere as a cyber-common: "UT is a place people are going to come together despite color, race, religion and anything. UT is going to be the front to bring all souls together to be one." In other words, UT makes more possible grassroots participation as a fundamental condition of the public sphere as a user known [Sabrnig](#) (2007) confirms: "I want to be around people who think and share ideas while we talk. I want to be a part of using technology to make a better world." Another UTer, [PublicAutopsy](#) (2007), summarizes these points: "statement on how UT breaks down barriers is very true. And the future of UT is heading to just that."

The forum participants propose an updated notion of the public sphere not only by enlarging popular participation, but also by problematizing Habermas's (1981; 1989) assumption of language and society. Addressing the practical impossibility of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, Lyotard (1984), however, criticizes his assumption of the "universal speech situation" as a fundamental condition of the public sphere. Lyotard (1984) believes that there can be no such thing as a "universal" speech situation in which anyone can openly discuss and mutually reach a consensus; rather, there are multiple as well as incommensurable communities of interest and meaning in which countless language games are deployed in specific contexts of authority, power, and legitimation in the real world. Therefore, individuality, disagreement, and discontent are true components of a more democratic public sphere, rather than an unrealistic ideal of mutual consensus which reproduces the status quo of discursive hegemony (Lyotard, 1984). In this regard, [Superangrymonkey](#) (2007) appraises the discursive value of disagreement on UT forums and emphasizes the importance of tolerance of other UTers' opinions: "You are debating; it is not any kind of violent conflict; it is [a discursive] Internet conflict." Even though not all users appreciate heated debates and disagreement, there are people who realize the true value of multiplicities of meaning and disagreement as precious attributes of the public sphere on UT. The Internet has created a communicative revolution, and this revolution can possibly proliferate difference-affirming communication to achieve a more democratic

public sphere. Again, this affirmative form of UT use is another practical issue which critical pedagogy has to promote by facilitating pedagogical uses of it.

UT videos retain a rich implication for a potential for deliberative conversations among people with different interests on the Internet. UT video postings can advance deliberative communications because of the presence of users' faces. Evaluating the potential of online discussion forums as the democratic public sphere, Papacharissi (2004) emphasizes the importance of civility and politeness to realize the true value of democratic conversation, because "the anonymity of cyberspace makes it easier for individuals to be rude" (p. 267). In other words, Internet hatred largely stems from anonymity. However, the presence of the faces in the videos, to some extent, increases responsible and deliberative conversations because UT breaks down "some of the anonymity of the Internet and the faceless user names" ([PublicAutopsy](#), 2007).

However, not all types of UT videos are helpful in creating an Internet public sphere in the nature of their intents and contents. As an indicator of the annual UT video trends, *Time* magazine's "Top 10 Viral Videos" reveals that most of the videos in the list are about comedy, parody, spoof, music video, celebrity, or sensational materials which mostly recirculate the dominant corporate media spectacles. For example, Chris Crocker's UT video *Leave Britney Alone!*,¹² in which Crocker hysterically defends pop star Britney Spears, was ranked #1 in the 2007 list and eventually "nabbed a reality show off the buzz from the video" (Keegan, 2007). In other words, many people use UT as a form of self-promotion which aims to grab attention from the public or the established entertainment industry. Eight videos in the list are similar to Crocker's hyper self-expression video. Likewise, the #1 video in the 2008 list is Matt Harding's video *Where the Hell is Matt?*¹³ For the clip, Harding recorded footage of himself doing a comic dance with local people during his 14-month trip to 42 different countries, which was partially funded by Stride Gum Company. Hamilton (2008) evaluates the video by saying, "The sheer silliness and joy of Harding's adventures will keep you smiling long after you've watched them." Seven videos in the list are of this type. In other words, the main trend of UT uses is not oriented to public issues of sociopolitical matters, but a different version of corporate media spectacles which eventually (re)produce the cultural hegemony of the status quo. Stated differently, a major trend of UT videos looks like a liberal individualist's cyber-democracy which is "complementary (and often conflated) with consumer capitalism" with affirmation of the dominant hegemony in society (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 163). In this respect, rather than just make-you-feel-good comic stories, deliberative communication with a high level of discursive interactivity is essential to realizing a true democratic public sphere (Schudson, 1997). In other words, interactive and decentralized communication has to be well combined with socially and politically deliberate purposes. As a

condition of deliberative communication in the public sphere, Dahlberg (2001) further stipulates communicative conditions which challenge the existing discourse:

Participants put forward and challenge claims and arguments about common problems, not resting until satisfied that the best reasons have been given and fully defended. Participants attempt to come to an understanding of their interlocutors and to reflexively modify their pre-discursive positions in response to better arguments. In this process private individuals become public-oriented citizens. (p. 167)

In terms of people's forms of Internet uses, thus, it is participants who make UT either a new-version of the public sphere or another cutting-edge playhouse on the Internet. In reality, regarding the colonization of the Internet by capital, the conditions for a deliberative public sphere are even worse because of the Internet's massive commercialization with sensitizing materials. Even though there are many websites that envision deliberative potential of the Internet, more people are prone to pursue personal interests such as entertainments on the Internet. However, as massive grassroots videos for the Obama campaign validate an optimistic speculation, UT is a good ground to test the Internet's potential to create and maintain a deliberative public sphere with its tremendous popularity. Therefore, it is evident that critical pedagogy should wage a reconstructive educational campaign which helps students exercise creativity to use UT for more egalitarian and democratic causes, because their forms of UT uses will eventually determine whether UT functions as a democratic public sphere or not. Among users who posted video responses which I examined, [Superangrymonkey](#) is the most salient advocate for deliberative communication on UT.

In general, users take advantage of UT as a new version of the public sphere from which they get their messages and pay attention to others. With UT videos, people can engage in intercultural and international communication more easily, and thus have favorable conditions for mutual collaborations. To some extent, UTers overcome the drawbacks of Habermas's notion of public sphere by embracing others and engaging in heated debates and disagreements, thus practically proving the necessity of users' caring attitude for others and "communicational rationality" which demands open, egalitarian access to ICTs. In terms of the forms of UT uses, UTers have the potential of the democratic public sphere in mind and, to some extent, they are developing a more egalitarian public sphere. A user, [Rcehoppe](#) (2007) summarizes the impact of UT's technological innovation: "Expressive Video. You are the person of the year."

YouTube: Empowering Communication for Grassroots Democracy

The proliferation of video communication is UT's main contribution to a communicative revolution on the Internet. However, it is people's concrete uses of UT that have implied vast sociopolitical effects. Phenomenally, UT has operated the democratization of media spectacles which envisions egalitarian potential of grassroots democracy to a larger extent. Individuals are no longer passive consumers of corporate media spectacles; rather, they actively produce their own videos and enjoy previously unimaginable attention from innumerable people with more practical impacts as in the case of the 2008 election. Considering that contemporary U.S. society is saturated with corporate media spectacles which devastate critical thinking skills (Kellner, 1995, 2003, 2005, 2008), UT is infused with the possibility of promoting a cultural politics of media spectacles. As a qualitatively different perspective on media spectacles' sociopolitical impacts, there has been a proliferation of grassroots self-made UT videos for the Obama campaign. Thus, with UT's contribution to the democratization of media spectacles, it becomes ever more relevant for critical pedagogy practitioners to implement Debord's (1967) project of transformational appropriation of media spectacles for social justice.

Relatively easy access to the Internet adds to its potential as a democratic mass communication medium. With the Internet's multi-directional or many-to-many communication, communicational conditions have been favorable for people's grassroots participation in media production. In turn, the conventional one-way relationship between the producers and the consumers of the media spectacles has been drastically challenged. In other words, the Internet has opened an alternative media spectacle situation for individuals to realize Benjamin's (1934/1978) belief that a "reader is at all times ready to become a writer" (p. 225). Ordinary people become deeply involved in the democratization of ideas and communication in the public sphere.

The Internet can be particularly beneficial for the marginalized who do not usually possess enough resources to organize any collective action which is a major means to changing society. Such people can use the Internet as a tool for egalitarian social changes by waging Gramsci's (1971) notion of a "war of position" in which they increasingly distribute their own sociopolitical perspectives and interests. Taking the example of Obama supporters' massive uses of UT videos in which they communicate their opinions and suggestions, people's transformative uses of UT as a movement mobilizer can translate a discursive UT "war of position" into a practical "war of maneuver" which begets real, practical changes in the world. From this point, again, [Zakgeorge21](#)'s discussion topic, "What do you think the implications of UT and what can be beneficial about it?" as a "practical question of how" is highly significant as an

occasion to reconsider UT as an alternative means of grassroots mobilization for collective action. In this regard, focusing on the “question of social change and how people on the margins take up and use the Internet” (p. 789), Mehra et al. (2004) substantiate how the Internet can empower the marginalized and oppressed in society.

People’s concrete sociopolitical contexts of Internet uses determine how it is used with various effects (Ainsworth, Hardy, & Harley, 2005; Brants, 2002; Cammaerts & Audenhove, 2005; Polat, 2005). Considering that communicative features of the Internet give people much broader space to participate in the discursive public sphere, deliberative dialogues among UT users can be the “vantage-point of a broader understanding of local agency” from which they actively engage in socially and politically significant issues (Ridell, 2002, p. 163). In other words, they can actively participate in a “space of interaction” for “actual issues in actual places” and “alternative views of the lived environment” (p. 162). A participant of the UT forum, [Superangrymonkey](#) (2007) cites its potential to realize a local agency: “I YouTube because I want to see some proactive change and I want to be a part of it.” UT’s potential for realizing grassroots democracy is revealing; however, there is still a question of how it should be exercised.

In terms of motivation (Polat, 2005), the forms of uses (Salter, 2004), and local agency (Ridell, 2002), the forum participants do not significantly pay attention to UT’s sociopolitical impacts for public-oriented issues. Most of the forum participants focus on UT’s value of a new free way of communicating with others: “We should do it and we should post this thing because it is free. They get the money from ads, so we should definitely take the advantage” ([Dmbertolami](#), 2007). Moreover, UTers derive individualistic pleasure from watching entertainment videos and produce narcissistic self-presentation of personal matters. To be sure, the quantitative increase of information (Rheingold, 1991) and the qualitative proliferation of video communication on UT have not always guaranteed any “proactive change” in the real world. In sum, the forms of UT uses in the discursive forum created by [Zakgeorge21](#) in 2007 reflect a liberal individualist’s cyber-democracy which is “complementary (and often conflated) with consumer capitalism” with affirmation of the dominant hegemony in society (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 163). In other words, there are still asymmetries between communicative competences online and users’ actual implementation of it on one hand, Internet’s potential for grassroots democracy and individuals’ practical, participatory exercises offline on the other hand. In order to claim a plausible argument on UT’s contribution to grassroots democracy, there should be many more pedagogic as well as social efforts to encourage more deliberative online activities and to transfer online video communications to offline participations.

However, experiences in the 2008 election provide a hopeful expectation for people to use UT videos for a social, civic-minded purpose, bringing up the

issue of transformative potential of the Internet. By developing their personal narratives, underrepresented people crucially utilize UT videos as an innovative platform for grassroots political mobilization as a tactical responsiveness for sociopolitical transformation. Thus, it demonstrates a high probability to reconsider the meaning of democratic polity as a grassroots model of mutual self-organization and collective governance. In this democratized situation of media spectacles, one of the most important implications of the election is that the transformative politics of UT is employed as a tool of social change. For example, ranked # 9 in *Time*'s "Top 10 Viral Videos in 2008," was a music video of Ron Clark Academy's students called *You Can Vote However You Like*;¹⁴ it is an exemplar that shows how UT can be massively utilized by virtually anyone who is interested in sociopolitical matters in everyday life. As a class project, the Academy's 6th and 7th graders selected a topic, wrote lyrics, and created choreography; the video was democratic as well as discursive from its inception to its contents.¹⁵ In sum, the students' video is an ideal exemplar for critical pedagogy practitioners to reconsider UT as an alternative pedagogical method because, as a crucial condition of the video's production, Academy's educational philosophy is inspirational, innovative, and student-centered pedagogy that has encouraged the students to engage in the technology and the issue.

Therefore, as long as individuals are motivated with specific sociopolitical purposes in their given situations, there is a strong probability that the Internet's deliberative public sphere can transform participants into real-life forces in society. Considering there are many political engagements organized and promoted by the Internet, UT's potential for creating participatory democracy is ever increasing. However, in order to achieve more participatory democracy, UT users have to be more deliberative and public oriented. Thus, it is a truly pedagogical issue to discuss how the potential of UT can be proliferated with many more people's grassroots participation in the cultural politics of media spectacles.

YouTube: The Internet's Potential for Oppositional Politics and Media Activism

In terms of the forms of use, there have been many oppositional uses of the Internet. The fundamental characteristic of the Internet, i.e., decentralized interactive communication, renders individuals' collective political and cultural practices more feasible. "Digital resistance" which imitates the way digital media processes information provides individuals with a different set of resources which they can operate for sociopolitical mobilization. Insofar as "resistance has come about through a combination of necessity and opportunity" (Russell, 2005, p. 514), UT provides us with unprecedented communicative opportunities to operate

social necessities for social movements, i.e., identity, narrative, leadership, and networks.¹⁶ Therefore, it is totally dependent upon individuals' concrete uses of UT whether it serves oppositional politics or the status quo.

Historically, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) is one of the earliest models of digital resistance that shows how the communicative power of the Internet has been harnessed to generate global attention and support for a peasant insurgency. The Internet played a pivotal role as a movement mobilizer that consolidated the collective power of the oppressed in the Zapatista movement in 1994 (Knudson, 1998). In other words, by drawing global attention to a region and helping users organize global demonstrations, the Internet provides far more opportunities to exert oppositional politics. Since the "Battle of Seattle" in 1999, there have been many worldwide anti-globalization movements orchestrated through the Internet (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). The global demonstration in February, 2003 against the U.S. invasion of Iraq clearly exemplifies the revolutionary power of individuals' uses of the Internet for oppositional politics (Hands, 2006; Kahn & Kellner, 2005). In terms of the relationship between democratic governance and digital resistance, the way those Internet-assisted movement mobilizations have been organized suggests a creative reconstruction of democracy as a formal system of political representation. In other words, the strategic use of the Internet to organize anti-war protests around the world is an example of "double democratization" that is "the democratization and restructuring of both civil society and the state in order to ensure active citizens and a containment of the power of global capital" (Hands, 2006, p. 236). Over the course of those mobilizations, individuals have actualized the essential meaning of democracy as a collective effort of self-governance. In other words, the communicative structure of the Internet and individuals' active uses of it make it possible to reconstruct relationships among activists as well as between activists and established institutions radically. Therefore, oppositional forms of Internet uses as digital resistance "are revolutionary and constitute a dramatic transformation of everyday life in the direction of more participatory and democratic potentials" (Kahn & Kellner, 2005, p. 94).

In order to fulfill the genuine potential of digital resistance, there should be actual down-to-earth democratic movements that can change concrete dimensions of everyday lives. From this point of view, I believe oppositional uses of the media technologies have much implication that helps realize the real value of grassroots democracy in the hyper-mediated society. Giving contextual information by video communication, UT has much more practical implication for sociopolitical mobilization because of its "inseparable mix of virtual and face-to-face communication" (Bennett, 2003, p. 149). Dialectic combinations of virtual and face-to-face communication by UT videos should be a genuine resource to

form and fortify activist networks for a successful social movement as was the case in the 2008 election. In other words, there is solid logical evidence for UT's role of agency-building for social transformation which produces "heightened experiences of interactivity, reducing uncertainty, and achieving positive relational forecasts" (Ramirez & Burgoon, 2004, p. 439, emphasis added). Bennett (2003) further elaborates the benefits and the potential of democratic movements through the Internet:

The ease of creating vast webs of politics enables global activist networks to finesse difficult problems of *collective identity* that often impede the growth of movements. To a remarkable degree, these networks appear to have undergone scale shifts while containing to accommodate *considerable diversity* in individual level *political identity*. (p. 164, emphasis added)

Again, it is this transformative value of UT's contribution to the democratization of media spectacle to which critical pedagogy should pay much theoretical and practical attention.

However, the majority of discussion participants are not aware of UT's possibility for oppositional politics or democratic media activism. Though [Zakgeorge21](#) and [Superangrymonkey](#) anticipate "serious changes" and "some proactive change" through uses of UT, respectively, many other UTers seem to be satisfied to use UT as a form of personal communication or entertainment and are skeptical of its potential for transformative media activism. A user, [Jessebearwear](#), (2007) articulates this point:

UT is going to change, but it is not going to change the world. UT is an excellent and great place to watch videos, but it is not a place to try to change the world. UT is not going to change the political aspect or social aspect of the world.

Even though UT could make some proactive social changes, a user named [Retardedfolks](#) (2007) does not believe that "it is going to change really anything, anytime soon, anything drastically." Instead of a means of sociopolitical transformation, users pursue a liberal individualist's perspective in satisfying their personal entertainment needs from UT. In other words, a major trend of UT use is confined to conformative liberalism in which individuals make use of UT as an instrumental tool of private good in the given sociopolitical conditions. In this vein of the argument, [Jessebearwear](#) (2007) describes main appeal of UT: "I think most people on UT want to have a little fun and watch an entertainment show to kill time." Likewise, for [NenoBrasil](#) (2007), being on UT means enjoying free entertainment: "in here we are free to watch whatever we want because there are millions of videos to watch." Or sometimes UTers cite other self-interested benefits: "It is a good fun to promote my web site for free advertising" ([Nickypoo31](#), 2007). Evidently, these users' motivations lack of a public-oriented

approach to the sociopolitical potential of UT uses, conforming the status quo in society.

"We" Tube: The Future of YouTube

The UT forum where users discuss its future provides a critical, reflective moment to consider their motives, concerns, and recommendations for making UT a unique online community. In terms of the forms of UT uses, [Zakgeorge21](#)'s initial video and other users' video responses prove the potential for participatory democracy as well as an updated aspect of Habermas's notion of the public sphere on the Internet. With its proliferation of video communication, together with the Internet's decentralized, participatory communication structure, it brings about the democratization of media spectacles. Furthermore, the participatory range created by UT has facilitated individuals' active engagement with sociopolitical matters as a means of movement mobilizers as seen in the 2008 U.S. election.

However, some of the defining problems and limitations of the Internet linger on UT. While the presence of the Internet is becoming more ubiquitous and its utilization more pervasive in society,¹⁷ the problem of digital divide is still a lingering obstacle to realizing a true participatory, grassroots democracy online.¹⁸ Of the 81 UT video postings examined, 77 were created and posted by Whites; only 4 were by non-Whites. Sixty-five postings were produced by men while 16 were by women. All the postings were in English. In short, UT discussion forum is mostly dominated by White, English-speaking male users as in the case of Habermas's public sphere. Of course, concerning the matter of access to the Internet, it is disproportionately occupied by the dominant class in society. This finding echoes the claim of Cammaerts and Audenhove (2005) that "online engagement in forums is cyclical, tends to be dominated by those already politically active in the offline world" (p. 193). Thus, the fundamental issue of universal access to the Internet is, as the "universal speech situation" of Habermas's public sphere, still an essential precondition of UT's democratization of media spectacles.

Moreover, even when the issue of access is met, the actual content of UT videos is another key component that demands much more pedagogic attention. In other words, not only the traditional problems of the digital divide, but also the substantial problem of UT content, is an important topic in the consideration of its practical potential for a more egalitarian society.¹⁹ From this point of view, the sociopolitical implication of UT videos as a movement mobilizer gives an important pedagogic as well as political topic to examine when an actual change is only possible by individuals' physical participation in transformative movements. Thus, in order to rebut that "the Internet reflects rather than circumvents offline power structures and relations" (Russell, 2005, p. 515), it is

crucial for critical pedagogy practitioners to take on the problem in the nature of UT video contents that assume sociopolitical impacts of them.

Considering the public sphere can only be intact without any form of outside control, a UT takeover by corporations is one of the most serious challenges to UT's potential as a democratic public sphere. Google's UT takeover entails, sooner or later, the "intrusion of market and commodity relations into the public sphere, and this results in the transformation of reasoning into consumption" (Robins & Webster, 1999, p. 104). In other words, grassroots videos on UT which make possible the democratization of media spectacle are eventually the subject of gatekeeping by Google's regulations on content matters. Unfortunately, in the copyright dispute between Warner Music and UT, thousands of self-made videos by ordinary UTers have already been taken away.²⁰ Considering that a majority of videos on UT are "replications of video footage commonly available elsewhere" in the traditional commercial media (Rajan, 2007), Google's control over UT videos will further loom based on copyright infringement restrictions.

Moreover, there may still be explicit censorship when UT videos have caused cultural and ideological clashes with many forms of sovereign powers. For example, Thailand blocked access to UT via Thai I.P. addresses since it found materials insulting Thai monarchy in 2006.²¹ Recently, Chinese government blocked UT because there were videos posted that showed Chinese police officers brutally beating Tibetans in Lhasa, Tibet.²² Likewise, when there is a clash between Google's corporate interests and UT videos' contents, it is obvious that the company is threatening "the ideal speech situation" as the core asset of the public sphere. In this discussion forum, [Retardedfolks](#) succinctly warns against Google's censorship on UT.

Advertising has already proliferated, and there are dangers of increasing commercialization and the expansion of a consumer and business culture, as well as possibilities of censorship and control.²³ Google made an announcement that it would sell UT spaces to advertisers as a means of its financial revenue makeover on top of showing advertisements within UT videos in November, 2008 (Clifford, 2008). With the announcement, there are direct or indirect skews toward commercial materials using sensational materials. In this respect, to keep the Internet as a public sphere, Blumler and Gurevitch (2001) propose "creating an authority with responsibilities for arranging, publicizing, moderating and reporting on the outcomes of a wide range of [corporate advertisers'] exercises" which distort individuals' content production and consumption (p. 9). Compared to previous stages of its development, there are increasing numbers of different types of advertisements on UT.²⁴

Lastly, however, and of the most importance, this study faces a significant methodological challenge to referencing Internet-based materials. Several studies

show that uses of online citations in academic journal articles raise serious issues of data stability, and in turn, entail attrition in reliability and validity. For example, Germain (2000) investigates that the availability of online data cited in academic journals is decreasing over time: 27% of URLs were invalid in 1997, 38% in 1998, and 48% in 1999. Examining 500 randomly selected online citations from information science journals, Casserly and Bird (2003) reveal that only 56.4% of them are available. Based on the four-year period content analysis of 1,126 URL references from articles published in five top journals of communication between 2000 and 2003, Dimitrova and Bugeja (2007) recently maintained that “it will take about three years for half of the internet citations to vanish” (p. 820). As an indication of the “ephemeral nature of online citations” that this paper makes from 14 UT videos (p. 818), as of April, 2009, I have noticed that 10 videos are not available since I did textual analysis of them in March, 2007. Because UT videos belong to individual producers and there is not a comprehensive archive system for them yet, their referential availability for future academic works solely depends on how long the producers keep on UT. Specifically, six videos no longer exist since they were removed by producers, three because users refused to share with others and one because the user entirely closed the UT account. In this regard, this study does not provide all the permanent reference information of the videos for future studies.

Consequently, there should be more extensive discussions on structural conditions of the Internet that prescribe individuals' concrete utilization of UT. As Brants (2002) indicates, without ordinary individuals' tangible participation in the public sphere on the Internet, the asymmetry in political competence will be more deteriorated from online political public sphere as well as offline resources in the given political economy structure of ICTs. “The greater the transparency and the larger the opportunities, the higher the expectations and the larger the disappointment. If this is so, ICT will not close but just widen the gap between politics and citizens” (p. 184). Therefore, in order to realize the Internet's potential contribution to participatory democracy, there should be not only individuals' active, critical utilization of the Internet, but also institutional reconstructions of ICTs. In this regard, the Obama administration's initiative on supplying broad-band Internet infrastructure as a part of its economic stimulus package demands much discussion.

Significantly, for practical intervention in political reconstruction of Internet communication infrastructure, people's collective actions, for which Internet communication provides much resource, are ever more important considering manpower is the major determinant for any sociopolitical change. In this respect, considering that “few effects of the Internet can be isolated from the ways in which it is used and the structures that are developed around these uses” (Salter, 2004, p. 201), individuals have to take active sociopolitical actions to

keep UT and the Internet as renewal of the public sphere “by influencing government and international policy...by creating applications that enable social movements and civil society groups to use the Internet effectively” (p. 202). This is why critical pedagogy has to intervene to encourage individuals to make active use of UT as a means of sociopolitical change because transformative uses of technologies require a clear educational and progressive vision.

Ultimately, it is highly natural that the future of UT between “the Internet’s democratic potential versus the actual commercial control of the net” is totally dependent upon UTers’ concrete forms of its uses (O’Loughlin, 2001, p. 608). Consequently, individuals have to take practical sociopolitical measures to sustain the potential of deliberate democracy on UT. For public educators it is highly important to develop new critical media pedagogies that help enable students to become active subjects of emerging media technology, and for students and citizens to use new media for responsible pedagogical and political goals, as well as self-expression and entertainment. In other words, individuals have to endeavor to realize the democracy of the media and the democracy through the media at the same time. With regard to this point of view, [Dmbertolami](#) (2007) replies to the discursive question of [Zakgeorge21](#): “The future is what you make. The change that we want to see in the future is what we are living right now.”

Notes

¹ For more detailed theoretical and practical investigation into critical pedagogy, see McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007; and McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007.

² For a more extensive context of Obama’s use of the phrase, see <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/10/campaign.lipstick/>. For a history of political uses of the phrase, see <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1840392,00.html>.

³ <http://dippolitics.dipdive.com/>

⁴ <http://www.obamain30seconds.org/>

⁵ For the social impact of YouTube on contemporary politics and pedagogy, see Kellner & Kim, 2009.

⁶ www.youtube.com/symphony

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/user/ucberkeley>

⁸ A more important contribution of politicians’ use of UT videos is that ordinary people can significantly challenge messages of the videos through parody: “In this kind of free-for-all, anything-goes Web...controlling the message is every candidate’s biggest challenge and dearest hope. Yes, candidates can

speak directly to voters. Of course, voters can speak directly back” (Vargas, 2007).

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of online videos’ contribution as a means of grassroots political mobilization, see Kim, in press.

¹⁰ See Habermas, 1981/1984.

¹¹ For a similar argument, see Hindman, 2008.

¹² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc&feature=channel_page

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlFKdbWwruY>

¹⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxIwYP0HNdc>

¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEKNAZbn9p0&feature=related>

¹⁶ See Kim, in press.

¹⁷ See Jones & Fox, 2009.

¹⁸ See Lenhart et al., 2003.

¹⁹ See Bimber, 2000, 2001

²⁰ See Arango, 2009.

²¹ For a more detail account, see Rosen, 2008.

²² See Helft, 2009b.

²³ See Chmielewski & Guynn, 2007.

²⁴ <http://www.redherring.com/blogs/25904>

References

- Ainsworth, S., Hardy, C., & Harley, B. (2005). Online consultation: E-democracy and e-resistance in the case of the development gateway. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19, 120-145.
- Arango, T. (2009, March 23). As rights clash on YouTube, some music vanishes. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/23/business/media/23warner.html?page=wanted=2&th&emc=th>
- Benjamin, W. (1978). *Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings* (P. Demetz, Ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (Original work published 1934)
- Bennett, W. L. (2003). Communicating global activism: Strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 6, 143-168.
- Bimber, B. (2000). The study of information technology and civic engagement. *Political Communication*, 17(4), 329-333.
- Bimber, B. (2001). Information and political engagement in America: The search for effects of information technology at the individual level. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1), 53-67.

- Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (2001). The new media and our political communication discontents: Democratizing cyberspace. *Information, Communication & Society*, 4, 1-13.
- Brants, K. (2002). Politics is e-verywhere. *Communications*, 27, 171-188.
- Brown, D. (1997). *Cybertrend*. London: Viking.
- Cammaerts, B., & Audenhove, L. (2005). Online political debate, unbounded citizenship, and the problematic nature of a transnational public sphere. *Political Communication*, 22, 179-196.
- Caplan, J. (2008, June 30). The citizen watchdogs of web 2.0. *Time*. Retrieved November 18, 2008, from <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1819187,00.html>
- Casserly, M. F., & Bird, J. E. (2003). Web citation availability: Analysis and implications for scholarship. *College and Research Libraries*, 64(4), 300-317.
- Chmielewski, D., & Guynn, J. (2007, August 24). Google tests ads in YouTube videos. *Los Angeles Times*, pp. C1, C8.
- Clifford, S. (2008, November 13). YouTube to sell advertising on pages of search results. *The New York Times*. Retrieved November 13, 2008, from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/technology/internet/13youtube.html?_r=1&emc=tnt&tntemail=y&oref=slogin
- Dahlberg, L. (1998). Cyberspace and the public sphere: Exploring the democratic potential of the net. *Convergence*, 4, 69-84.
- Dahlberg, L. (2001). Democracy via cyberspace. *New Media & Society*, 3, 157-177.
- Dawson, M., & Bellamy, J. (1996). Virtual capitalism: The political economy of the information highway. *Monthly Review*, 48, 40-59.
- Debord, G. (1967/1994). *The society of the spectacle*. New York: Zone Books.
- Dimitrova, D. V., & Bugeja, M. (2007). The half-life of internet references cited in communication journals. *New Media Society*, 9, 811-826.
- [Dmbertolami](#). (2007, January 10). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDFbOevLPAI>
- Eisenberg, A. (2008, December 7). Zeroing in on your favorite video clips. *The New York Times*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/07/business/07novel.html?emc=tnt&tntemail=y>
- [Endhatefools](#). (2007, January 10). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb0u1yxkgqk>
- Feenberg, A. (2002). *Transforming technology: A critical theory revisited*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Flatley, M. (2005). Blogging for enhanced teaching and learning. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 68, 77-80.
- Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of the actually existing democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed). *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109-142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Freire, P. (1970/ 2006). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Continuum.
- Gergle, D., Kraut, R., & Fussell, S. (2004). Language efficiency and visual technology: Minimizing collaborative effort with visual information. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 23, 491-517.
- Germain, C. A. (2000). URLs: Uniform resource locators or unreliable resource locators. *College and Research Libraries*, 61(4), 359-365.
- Goldfarb, B. (2002). *Visual pedagogy: Media cultures in and beyond the classroom*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds., Trans.). New York: International Publishers.
- Grossman, L. (2006, November). Best inventions of 2006. *Time*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.time.com/time/2006/techguide/bestinventions/inventions/youtube.html>
- Habermas, J. (1981/1984). *The theory of communicative action, Vol. 1: Reason and the rationalization of society* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/ decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79* (pp. 128-138). New York: Routledge.
- Hamilton, A. (2008). Top 10 viral videos. *Time*. Retrieved December 15, 2008, from http://www.time.com/time/specials/2008/top10/article/0,30583,1855948_1864281,00.html
- Hands, J. (2006). Civil society, cosmopolitics and the net: The legacy of 15 February 2003. *Information, Communication & Society*, 9, 225-243.
- Hardy, M. (2006, June 27). The self-made star: A camcorder, a computer, and a goofy streak were all she needed to launch a career in show biz. *The Boston Globe*. http://www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2006/06/27/the_self_made_star/?page=1
- Heffernan, V. (2008, November 16). Clicking and choosing. *The New York Times*. Retrieved November 16, 2008, from

- http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/16/magazine/16wwln-medium-t.html?_r=1&emc=tnt&tntemail1=y&oref=slogin
- Helft, M. (2009a, January 18). At first, funny videos. Now, a reference tool. *The New York Times*. Retrieved January 18, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/business/media/18ping.html>
- Helft, M. (2009b, March 24). YouTube blocked in China, Google says. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/25/technology/internet/25youtube.html?_r=1&th&emc=th
- Heng, M., & de Moor, A. (2003). From Habermas's communicative theory to practice on the internet. *Information Systems Journal*, 13, 331-352.
- Hindman, M. (2008). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hollander, R. (1985). *Video democracy*. Mt. Airy, MD: Lomond Publication.
- [Jessebearwear](#). (2007, January 13). Re: "We"Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddmieEpwDqU>
- Jones, S., & Fox, S. (2009, January 28). *Generations online in 2009*. Washington, DC: The Pew Internet & American Life Project. http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Generations_2009.pdf
- Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2004). New media and internet activism: From the "battle of Seattle" to blogging. *New Media & Society*, 6, 87-95.
- Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2005). Oppositional politics and the internet: A critical/reconstructive approach. *Cultural Politics*, 1, 75-100.
- Keegan, R. W. (2007). Top 10 viral videos. *Time*. Retrieved December 15, 2007, from http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/top10/article/0,30583,1686204_1686303_1690876,00.html
- Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture*. London: Routledge.
- Kellner, D. (2003). *From September 11 to terror war: The dangers of the Bush legacy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Kellner, D. (2005). *Media spectacle and the crisis of democracy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Kellner, D. (2008). Media spectacle and the 2008 presidential election: Some pre-election reflections. *Mediascape: UCLA's Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, Fall 08.
- Kellner, D., & Kim, G. (2009). YouTube, politics, and pedagogy: Some critical reflections. In R. Hammer & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches* (pp. 615-636). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Kim, G. (in press). Online videos for the Obama campaign in the 2008 U.S. presidential election: Some reflections on internet's attributes for grassroots political participation. In M. Eastin & T. Daugherty (Eds.), *The handbook of research on digital media and advertising*.
- Knudson, J. (1998). Rebellion in Chiapas: Insurrection by internet and public relations. *Media, Culture & Society*, 20, 507-518.
- Lenhart, A., Horrigan, J., Rainie, L., Allen, K., Boyce, A., Madden, M. & O'Grady, E. (2003, April 16). *The ever-shifting internet population: A new look at access and the digital divide*. Washington, DC: The Pew Internet & American Life Project. http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2003/PIP_Shifting_Net_Pop_Report.pdf.pdf
- Lenhart, A., Horrigan, J. & D. Fallows, D. (2004, February 29). *Content creation online*. Washington, D.C.: The Pew Internet & American Life Project. URL: http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2004/PIP_Content_Creation_Report.pdf.pdf
- Livingstone, S., Bober, M., & Helsper, E. (2005). Active participation or just more information? Young people's take-up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet. *Information, Communication & Society*, 8, 287-314.
- Lyotard, J. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McChesney, R. (2002). The Titanic sails on: Why the internet won't sink the media giants. In G. Dines and J. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race and class in media*. London: Sage.
- McKee, A. (2001). A beginner's guide to textual analysis. *Metro Magazine*, 127/128, 139-149.
- McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (2005). *Teaching against global capitalism and the new imperialism: A critical pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McLaren, P., & Jaramillo, N. (Eds.). (2007). *Pedagogy and praxis in the age of empire*. Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- McLaren, P., & Kincheloe, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- McMillan, S., & Morrison, M. (2006). Coming of age with the internet: A qualitative exploration of how the internet has become an integral part of young people's lives. *New Media & Society*, 8, 73-95.
- Mehra, B., Merkel, C., & Bishop, A. (2004). The internet for empowerment of minority and marginalized users. *New Media and Society*, 6, 781-802.

- Millard, R. (2007, March 5). BBC sings YouTube deal. *Australian IT*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://australianit.news.com.au/articles/0,7204,21326082%5E15318%5E%5Enbv%5E15306,00.html>
- Mitra, A. (2002). Theorizing cyberspace: The idea of voice applied to the internet discourse. *New Media and Society*, 4, 479-498.
- [NenoBrasil](#). (2007, January 12). *Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1YHCDnuiG8>
- [NicholasPickolas](#). (2007, January 14). *Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQdCdUwBVs>
- [Nickypoo31](#). (2007, January 14). *Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KV2e9u-an2o>
- O'Loughlin, B. (2001). The political implications of digital innovations: Trade-offs of democracy and liberty in the developed world. *Information, Communication & Society*, 4, 595-614.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2004). Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online public discussion groups. *New Media & Society*, 6, 259-283.
- Pew Internet & American Life Project. (2008, June 15). *Politics goes viral online*. Retrieved November 14, 2008, from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/869/politics-goes-viral-online>
- Polat, R. (2005). The internet and political participation: Exploring the explanatory links. *European Journal of Communication*, 20, 435-459.
- Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2008, July 12). *Election 2008: Candidate web sites, propaganda or news?* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved November 14, 2008, from <http://www.journalism.org/files/candidatesitestudy.pdf>
- [PublicAutopsy](#). (2007, January 23). *Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC2A1HqPjZU>
- Rainie, L. (2008, June 10). *Teenagers' Online Safety and Literacy*. Lecture given to Point Smart/ Click Safe Summit. Retrieved July 9, 2008, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2008/Online-child-safety-and-literacy.aspx>
- Rajan, A. (2007, March 20). *Shaddup your Facebook: The social networking site for twentysomethings is churning out a generation of navel-gazing pseudo-celebs*. Retrieved April 9, 2007, from <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/article/2977>

- Ramirez, A., & Burgoon, J. (2004). The effects of interactivity on initial interactions: The influence of information valence and modality and information richness on computer-mediated interaction. *Communication Monograph*, 71, 422-447.
- [Rcehoppe](#). (2007, January 11). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nP6hiBPHCs>
- [Retardedfolks](#). (2007, January 11). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zWtSVQct9k&mode=related&search>
- Rheingold, H. (1991). The great equalizer. *Whole Earth Review*, 71, 6.
- Rheingold, H. (1993). *The virtual community: Homesteading on the electronic frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Ridell, S. (2002). The web as a space for local agency. *Communications*, 27, 147-169.
- Robins, K., & Webster, F. (1999). *Times of the technoculture: From the information society to the virtual life*. New York: Routledge.
- Rosen, J. (2008, November 30). Google's gatekeepers. *The New York Times*. Retrieved December 1, 2008, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/magazine/30google-t.html?emc=tnt&tntemail1=y>
- Russell, A. (2005). Editorial: Exploring digital resistance. *New Media & Society*, 7, 513-515.
- [Sabrnig](#). (2007, February 3). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fljRPrCYf0>
- Salter, L. (2004). Structure and forms of use: A contribution to understanding the "effects" of the internet on deliberative democracy. *Information, Communication & Society*, 7, 185-206.
- Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14, 297-309.
- [Superangrymonkey](#). (2007, January 11). Re: "We" Tube: The future of YouTube. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrH5VqOYsM8&mode=related&search>
- Thomas, S. (1994). Artifacts study in the analysis of culture: A defense of content analysis in a postmodern age. *Communication Research*, 21(6), 683-697.
- Tucker, E. (2007, March 5). Police departments deputize YouTube. *USA Today*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/surveillance/2007-03-04-youtube-crime_N.htm?csp=34

- Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2002). New media, new movements? The role of the internet in shaping the “anti-globalization” movement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 5, 465-493.
- Vargas, J. (2007, March 2). YouTube gets political. *Washington Post*. Retrieved May 5, 2007, from <http://www.concordmonitor.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070304/REPOSITORY/703040352>
- Werbin, K. (2005). Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice. *Canadian Journal of Communication* 30, 165-166.
- Wilhelm, A. (2000). *Democracy in the digital age: Challenges to political life in cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.
- YouTube. (2009). *YouTube glossary: Featured videos*. Retrieved April 23, 2009, from <http://help.youtube.com/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=143421>
- Xanthius. (2007, January 11). *Re: “We” Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15053Q1L4dQ&mode=related&search>
- Zakgeorge21. (2007, January 9). *“We” Tube: The future of YouTube*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7JgtjeIsuY>

Author

Gooyong Kim is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, UCLA. He is working on his dissertation about people’s grassroots mobilization for sociopolitical matters utilizing new media technologies. Specifically, YouTube videos for the Obama campaign in the 2008 U.S. presidential election are the subject of the dissertation research. He is interested in theorizing the intersectionality between agency, structure, technology, pedagogy, and social transformation. He can be reached at gooyong@ucla.edu.