Re-discovering *the Political*: the Prying Actions of Russian Bloggers

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Abstract

The purpose of my research is to investigate whether there are connections between blogging and the constitution of the public sphere in the Russian context. However, in order to embark on such exploration, the understanding of blogging *as such* is required. In achieving this task I had to construct a theoretical constellation, which will offer ample room for re-discovering blogging and enabling me to see it from different perspectives. However, successful explorations happen only through struggle, so in order to establish such context, diametrically opposed theorists of Public Sphere were chosen – namely, Hannah Arendt and Jurgen Habermas. Their insights unraveled the complexity inherent in public life and the difficulty in creating clear-cut distinctions between public and private. Nevertheless, the understanding of the public according to Arendt – where freedom in perspectives is ensured and members co-exist together neither ruling over each other or ruled – prevailed, as the freedom of perspectives is present in my empirical case, albeit arranged and organized in a museum like manner.

In order to establish the links between blogging and public sphere, I followed a content analysis of the website besttoday.ru, which compiles the best blog entries on a daily basis. I concentrated on the linguistic instances the blog entries show, but I was not restricted merely to the language used; I incorporated the analysis of the visual material – pictures – which advances further the prevalence of multiple free perspectives and their peculiar arrangement points to the genealogy of the museums.

My theoretical framework and my empirical case were cemented by the understanding of the political, as suggested by Chantal Mouffe. The insights of Mouffe are of paramount importance, as they helped me congeal the theoretical debates into an empirical "whole." Furthermore, Mouffian insights led me to the conclusion that our understanding of politics has been standardized by the idealization of "rational communication" as suggested by Habermas. The elaboration on political genealogy by Wendy Brown advances such conclusions and urges for establishing a free space, where proper reconsideration on action is possible. Re-investigating our blogging activities constitute merely the beginning of such endeavor.

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"In the beginning there was the Word."
John 1:1

INTRODUCTION

Vladimir Putin won the Russian presidential election on March 4, 2012, which signified his return to power for a third term. Most people were not surprised by the elections' result as there was not any major oppositional candidate running to begin with. Nevertheless, there were other surprises after the elections in the form of rallies, flash mobs, social gatherings, and clashes with the police. This turbulence – quite unusual for the "politically apathetic" majority - has been attributed by the media[1] to the activities of prominent bloggers such as Alexey Navalny, who gained fame due to his virtual battle against corruption. Navalny was also the first who called the ruling political party of United Russia as the "Party of Thieves and Crooks." But why so much "noise" now and why bloggers are held accountable for it? The Russian blogosphere has been a blind spot in academic research, according to Eugene Gorny,[2] because most studies exclude non-English speaking domains. However, this very blind spot forces us to reconsider our perception of human action, pay attention to the context, and finally, re-structure our understanding of politics. Only through re-discovering the context can one understand it, and bloggers symbolize such re-discovery because they offer a different perspective – in this case unfavorable to Putin's rise for a third time. The starting point of this research is whether blogging constitutes action as well as whether it builds a public sphere or multiple alternative public spheres overall.

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[1] Robert, Greenall, "LiveJournal: Russia's unlikely internet giant" *BBC NEWS*. 1 March, 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/magazine-17177053

[2] Eugene, Gorny, "Russian LiveJournal: National specifics in the development of a virtual community" Russian-cyberspace.org. May 13, 2004. http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/russ-cyb/library/texts/en/gorny_rlj.pdf

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The blog has become its own genre[3] and its unique characteristics, such as its instant availability, its personal tone and its interactive nature are closely related to the aspect of articulation, which fixes "meaning through the contingent connection of signifying elements" and connects these meanings to "certain institutions and social relations."[4] On the besttoday.ru website, the reader perceives the articulation in three different ways: personal reflections of the bloggers, a discussion prober, and sporadically a journalistic professional articulation that is enmeshed in the website but which belongs to the strictly speaking media sphere. The existence of variety, however, is not to be confused with information overflow. This happens because the website itself crystallized – as stated in the mission statement – after blogging became a prolific activity and attracted more readers. Besttoday.ru was published on June 1, 2010, and it follows a hybrid version of a newspaper accustomed to the needs of bloggers. There are sections entitled as "news reports" or "news articles" but predominantly many sections are linked to the content of the blogs – as well as other social media postings, such as twitter - which gives a unique layout to the website. In addition to this imbrication between "traditional news" and "blogging news" the virtual terrain of the website includes various multimedia materials that are ubiquitous in any posting or news report that are closely related to the old-fashioned medium of opinion piece, albeit not identical to it. This brief sketch introduces the multilayered articulation the reader is exposed to; the website resembles the first stage of acquainting oneself with the bloggers' content, as well as to the blogger's account, and to the blogger's links of social media profiles (Twitter, Facebook).

Since its publication, the website gained virtual prestige as according to its mission it solves the coordination problem that rises between blogging content generators and blogging audience.

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[3] Carolyn, Miller and Dawn, Shepherd, "Blogging as Social Action- A Genre Analysis of the Blog" http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html

[4] Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, "Methodological Reflections on Discourse Analysis" In : Yoshiko M. Herrera and Braumoeller, Bear F. "Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis," Newsletter of APSA, 2, no. 1 (2004), 28

More importantly, its popularity gained momentum as the demonstrations before and after the election were organized. However, the popularity during the demonstrations is just one side of the coin, the other side is the innovation of besttoday.ru in enabling the manifestation of different individual perspectives – not merely through writing but through visual perspective captured in a picture. The difference between the blogging website and other social networking options is that it is restricted to a specific context, which is not monopolized by an individual page (as happens on facebook) bur rather integrated in a free space of "discussion-prober." The prober section is not restricted to discussion, but leaves ample room for creativity, humor, and emotional expression and articulation. Thus, the link between the virtual potential of being with others that this website offers – including the generation of amateur journalistic account – and human action is strong, but it is forged only because of the particular Russian context.

The task of chapter one is to familiarize the reader with that context and the Russian political order, as well as identify the main points of discontent between the present and the past. Furthermore, chapter one serves as a theoretical preparation through delimiting the most important ideas of Chantal Mouffe's conception of *the political* in which antagonism and disagreement plays a crucial part and has been disregarded equally by academics and liberal politicians. Furthermore, in this chapter the Russian media situation will be analyzed and linked with the emergence of blogging, mainly as an individual articulation in public always in respect to articulation.

In order to connect blogging-articulation to human action and respond to the twofold question regarding the constitution of the public sphere, I embark on an intellectual exploration of the works of Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas, and Wendy Brown, which comprise my theoretical framework in chapter two. Their insights will be constructed around the work of Chantal Mouffe, whose re-introduction of politics complements the understanding of human action, observed in

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blogging activities. The understandings of the public, especially between Arendt and Habermas, are diametrically opposed. That's precisely the reason why they must be incorporated in understanding the "blind spot" of Russian blogs. While Arendt expresses the importance of freedom in perspectives, Habermas insists on standardized rules of communication and most of media studies have been allured to directly apply these rules, and if the rules are absent, they conclude that there is no public sphere. Such direct application is self-limiting as it shadows the micro-processes taken place in the blogosphere, which are inextricably connected with a specific context. Thus, fostering responsibility and thoughtfulness in our action seems of dire importance, and here Brown's political genealogy on conviction holds the theoretical construction together.

Considering the intellectual diversity of the above mentioned authors, I concentrate on certain themes that are ubiquitous on the website: anti-Putin sentiment, articulation of humor, and the constitution of individual perspective in public through multimedia incorporation. These themes comprise my nodal points and are analyzed in chapter three. The last chapter draws heavily on demonstrations and their virtual articulation; however, it also functions as a reminder of the media situation, the importance of variety, and finally, after drawing extensively on chapter two, they point towards potential answers.

A meticulous exploration of the Russian blogosphere – even limited as happens in the case of besttoday.ru – may take an immense amount of time; thus, I focus mainly on the "discussion-prober" section of the website. The thematic thread unifying my blog entries are the nodal points mentioned above, while my approach is enabled by content analysis. However my analysis is not restricted to pure linguistic investigation of the blogging content, which of course plays a significant part as I analyze categorical metaphors circulated on the streets and on the virtual terrain. I treat content as a "relation" embedded in the linguistic expression - a relation between bloggers in the

blogosphere and their dynamics outside of it, as the contextual change plays a paramount role in understanding the constitution of public sphere. However, my content analysis would have been rather sterile if I didn't incorporate virtual material; therefore, in the third chapter I put together some photos in order to highlight the variety of perspectives that co-exist on the virtual realm.

CHAPTER 1- THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN RUSSIA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOGGING

There are three starting questions that imbue my research: Why Vladimir Putin's return – even though he brings the same political message – ignites such a mobilization among the Muscovites? Why did they express their desire for legitimate elections and demand to practice the right to assemble guaranteed by the thirty first article of the Russian Constitution?[5] And most importantly, what role does blogging play in this political re-emergence and re-imagination and how is it linked to the complexities of human action? I argue that blogging is the main carrier of the Russian political imagination as it is uniquely positioned between the individual (private) and the rest (public), it offers ample space for self-articulation in public – which constitutes action - and as a news aggregator it fills the gap state censorship created in the Russian media terrain. Furthermore, blogging matters because it is extensively used by those who allegedly don't matter in the Russian political life as they constitute the minority – reminiscent of the class of "dissidents" - as well as it offers a place for self-expression that traditional oppositional media is unable to offer. So far in the academic discourse, approaches to blogging specifically concentrate whether the "blogosphere" can be considered as an extension of the public sphere or whether it generates multiple alternative/counter public spheres.[6] This twofold question will be ubiquitous throughout the thesis, however in order to approach it properly I elaborate on the political and media situation in Russia first - which is inextricably linked with the blogging phenomenon. In this chapter, I concentrate on the current political situation of Russia, I interleave the insights of Chantal Mouffe in order to grasp the difference between politics and *the political*, then I move on exploring the ambivalent relationship

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[5] I refer to Article 31 of the Russian Constitution, http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-03.htm
[6] Marianne Van Den Boomen, "Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 9

between media and power and finally, I situate the blogging phenomenon among those contextual layers.

1.1 The Russian Political Order

The Laws of Nature might exist but it is only in the hands of a sovereign authority to "fix meaning" and maintain social order, as Thomas Hobbes ardently believed.[7] In order to produce a meaning common for all people, the sovereign must be unchallengeable and able to "name what can be held by men…[and] invest in education and not coercion."[8] Furthermore, the sovereign must be rational, limit its authority, and moderate its actions mainly because self preservation will prevail: if the people realize that the sovereign does not protect them they will constrain the sovereign through a revolution.[9] All these attributes of the sovereign can be seen in Putin's regime, since he was a technocrat whose name became identified with a relative political and economic stability. The meaning that he came to "fix" was the re-emergence of state's power and imposture of policies which represented the "interests of the country as a whole."[10] His message remained the same, but its meaning does not resonate with the Russian people anymore, as the massive demonstrations in Moscow – and not only – have clearly shown. Yet, he became the president of Russian Federation in spite of forged election results and the demonstrations that took place prior and after the elections. He became the sovereign for the third time, yet with many dangers hovering over him, especially the danger of the opposition. The people's response vitiate current political power configuration as the reality does not emanate from his decisions but assumes a life of its own, not necessarily in his favor.

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[7] Michael C. Williams , "Hobbes and International Relations: A reconsideration", *International Organization*,2, (1996), 218
[8] Williams, 219
[9] Williams, 220
[10] Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice.* (New York: Routledge,2004), 40

One of the things that have changed is the understanding of the political language. Referring briefly to Hobbes, who aptly pointed out the immense importance of language, since the art of word was "one of the reasons human communities lacked the natural harmony enjoyed by other species."[11] Language was also a powerful tool in creating the meaning necessary for social and political order. Especially, *viva vox* – the spoken word - becomes important as only through *viva vox* could the sovereign forge a judgment "that ended controversy" and ensured legitimacy. Therefore, when the sovereign uses the spoken word it doesn't allow multiple interpretations. Putin's millennium manifesto was circulated on the internet on December 28, 1999[12], and constituted the basis for his subsequent interviews and public appearances. Russia at the Turn of the Millennium – which was the official name of the document - outlined very clearly the break with the communist past, solemnly rejected the outbreak of a new revolution, and condemned imported models of economic experimentation. Russia had to find a new way and this way is described in the manifesto as a combination of "the universal principles of market economy and democracy with Russian realities" which is a clear message to people who yearn for stability. *Viva vox* in the Russian context was Putin's address of the challenges the country faced but also his personal interferences in the text, such as the increased uses of "I" and "as I see it" lead us to Hobbes' understanding of reality in terms of human subjectivity, as analyzed by Williams. Putin's subjectivity, however, strikes a sensitive chord with the Russian population not only because he addresses the lack of stability and order, but because he offers elements that unite people such as patriotism, a strong state, and an efficient economy. These ideological "blocks" comprise the new message Putin brought with his

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[11] Pat Maloney, Leaving the Garden of Eden: Linguistic and Political Authority in Thomas Hobbes" *History of Political Thought,* 18, no. 2 (1997), 259

[12] Sakwa, 40

ascendance to power and as he concludes in the manifesto *"Everything depends on us, and us alone. On our ability to see the size of the threat, to pool forces and set our minds to hard and lengthy work."*[13]

The image of the Russian sovereign today is completely different. Instead of the popularity that Putin enjoyed there is a multitude of satirical depictions and songs widely circulated on the blogosphere about the same things that gained him respect in the past. The unexpected success of Citizen-Poet (a cascade of satirical theatrical pieces permeated with Russian cultural significance) captures the need to distance oneself from the political reality. A primary space in this theatrical mockery occupies Putin's subjectivity – as described above - which is especially targeted. In addition to the mockery, there are certain incidents that gained momentum – such as the hunger strike of a political candidate in Astrakhan, a girls' "punk" group performing inside the cathedral of Jesus the Savior, the persistent demonstrations and their coverage by the NTV channel, as well as the coverage of Kommersant with a rather flattering picture of Putin looking at the polls. These incidents – albeit not the only ones - indicate that the Russian political order definitely has changed and requires a different approach and perhaps even a systemic re-organization. More succinctly, in the words of Vladimir Pozner "people want to be heard, and Putin does not understand that"[14], capture the political atmosphere of Russia today. Here, discussions about the nature of the current political regime is rather sterile in political and academic sense, since the plethora of processes imbedded in the current situation spreads beyond a label "authoritarian regime" or "democratic sovereignty"; instead what can be detected is the mobilization of oppositional forces in a non-traditional way, which is realized through blogging. Nevertheless, more on its significance will be provided in the second and third section of this chapter, as for the moment I want to concentrate on

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[13] Extracts were taken from a document file translation Russia at the turn of the Millenium, which was also publicized in Izvestia, and analyzed by Gavin Slade, http://www.sras.org/deconstructing_the_millennium_manifesto
[14] Interview with Vladimir Pozner: http://vladimirpozner.ru/

Putin's regime and its chief characteristics, mainly because they will facilitate the transition to our exploration of the media situation as well as Chantal Mouffe's insights on politics and *the political*.

Putin's state does not fight for survival among other states but rather establishes a meaning in the domestic sphere to ensure its own political survival among different entrepreneurial and criminal groups through declaring the survival for the society as a "whole." When he proclaims that a strong state will fight corruption, will be based on meritocracy, and will upgrade the level of judiciary system he essentially seeks legitimacy of his own rule. Interestingly enough, legitimacy as an idea strokes a sensitive chord with the people who experienced the chaotic nineties under Boris Yeltsin – also aptly depicted in the popular culture of the time - and promises stability complemented perfectly any claims for legitimacy. However, any ideas have their own embedded meanings in a certain context and as the context changes – as it happens in the Russian case - the ideas inadvertently change. Putin used legitimacy in order to proclaim meritocracy in all the bureaucratic agencies, therefore leading to an institutionalization of such bureaucracies that might escape the state's control in the long run, which they did with the help of the internet as attested in the elections campaign. The hunger strike in Astrakhan by Oleg Shein shows the other face of meritocracy, which excludes Putin even though he was the first one to overtly proclaim it but choose to disregard it, when it clashed with his interests.

What is the role for the Russian citizens in this political configuration? In Sergei Prozorov's account the Russians are confused:

"The fractured society clumsily asks [the president] how to become whole, and he
answers that it must become wealthy. Strictly speaking, the president's response

is tautological: he refers to efficiency, while the question is about charting that very social unity, which subsequently may be found efficient or inefficient."[15]

In order to understand the current Russian situation, Prozorov examines the late Soviet Period and reminds us of the "Janitor Generation", which for him encapsulates the politics of disengagement: highly educated individuals decided to undertake jobs of minimum wage in order to "maximize their free time" and cultivate their autonomy away from the political life. Even people working in the traditional sense manifested their refusal by "using the working time for private activities."[16] Prozorov establishes the link between the system and the people through analyzing the poetry of Grebenshikov, which poignantly describes such practices. Furthermore, the "Janitor Generation" is the ultimate example of being "beside the system," since these educated janitors did not want to destroy the system – as dissidents did, according to Prozorov - but coexist with it on their own terms. The late Soviet period accommodated such social practices of disengagement which were only buttressed after the collapse of the USSR and reinforced by the fecundity of violence across the country. However, the Russian political order is unable to accommodate disengagement *as such* any longer, as the accumulation of the "private activities" deprives from a public coexistence simply because whatever matters to the private individual is completely irrelevant for anyone else, echoing Hannah Arendt's understanding of the private life. This deprivation is accentuated by the lack of independent media that is tackled in the next section.

1.2 Russian Independent Media or its Non-existence

There are six different models that appeared on the Russian media's terrain after the mid-1980s and 1990s according to Yassen N. Zassoursky's account, including: glasnost, the fourth estate

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[15] Sergei Prozorov, The Ethics of Postcommunism: History and Social Praxis in Russia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 31.
[16] Prozorov, 93

media model, the corporate authoritarian model, a combined free press-corporate model, a federal state-controlled model, the regional media model and the money-making commercial model. Such a variety of "types" suggests the existence of fierce competition in the Russian media landscape, where blogging gains ground mainly because many journalists proper engage in the blogging practice. Key features of the institutionalization of journalism such as professionalized norms for news reporting, adherence to a common code of ethics and the protection of sources have been crucial for the development of a functional public sphere in modern democracies, as Hallvard Moe notes.[17] However, in the Russian context where journalists are severely beaten or killed, the blogging activity does not guarantee protection nevertheless it does offer publicity and instant dissemination of ideas and news reports strongly deviating from the rigid state-line, such as in the case of Svetlana Robenkova who publicized how a top-manager from Gazprom's bank escaped justice after almost killing a two-year old child.[18] The competition for media control between the private sector and the government is fierce, but the recent coverage of the "Anatomy of Protest" by NTV channel shows that the government seized the lion's share in TV broadcasting living the public with almost no alternative choices. Yet, the "do it yourself journalism" offers a way out; when ordinary individuals became active producers of news, they ultimately challenged the mainstream media production, offered a new mode of news distribution, and were mobilized because of the "open publishing" technology they obtained.[19] However, what type of a "voice" persists and which voices are just fleeting in the ever increasing "news-noise"?

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[17] Hallvard Moe, "Everyone a pamphleteer? Reconsidering comparisons of mediated public participation in the print age and the digital era," *Media, Culture and Society* 32, (2010), 695

[18] Svetlana Rovenkova's blog: http://robenkova.livejournal.com/

[19] Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 304

The "do-it-yourself" journalism is a new phenomenon in Russia, and in order to realize its potential a brief comparison with its American counterpart is illuminating. However, such a re-discovery of journalism generates a dilemma: where is the dividing line between news-generators and audience? There is a multitude of such voices, while very few of them are ultimately heard as, Henry Farrell and Daniel W. Drezner realized while examining American blogs. They started with the question "who constitutes the audience of blogs?", and they subsequently found that most blogs are read by journalists and opinion leaders, who prefer to read former colleagues and strengthen the personal network ties between blogs and mainstream media.[20] The main reason why "elite blogs" emerge is because they solve the coordination problem between bloggers and the audience: since there is a multitude of blogs and readers do not possess unlimited time, the elite blogs serve as "focal" points referring the readers to different blog-entries through hyperlinks.[21] This service that elite blogs offer to readers partially explains their close relationship with mainstream media, which can take advantage of the readership materially. Moreover, the relationship between mainstream media and elite bloggers can be explained through the expertise that bloggers possess and can channel instantly to the cyberspace. The most recent development of such media "synergy" can be found at the website besttoday.ru, which comprises my empirical case. For now however, theoretically speaking the phenomenon of "elite-bloggism" challenges the assumption that the web "will generate a great deal of new, easily accessible content"[22] which will lower the cost of political info, as well as it will "ameliorate the inequalities of attention to views and information sources that are outside of the political mainstream."[23] This might be true for the American context, but definitely doesn't hold for the Russian since elite-bloggism is incorporated in a mosaic of individual

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[20] Farrell and Drezner, 17
[21] Farrell and Drezner, 22
[22] Hindman, Mathew, "Googlearchy: How a Few Heavily-linked Sites Dominate Politics on the Web." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association,Chicago, IL(2003), 3
[23] Ibid, 3

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voices which siphons the content and encourages instant-discussions and articulations rather highlighting the virtual presence of one blogger.

The website besttoday.ru operates exactly as a "nodal point" in the Russian blogosphere, but instead of being restricted to just one elite-blogger (e.g. Malgin or Oleg Kozyrev) it offers the opportunity to anyone to cover a story. Furthermore, it imitates the outlook of a traditional newspaper and includes links to online versions of oppositional papers like *Novaya Gazeta*, but it generates peculiar content that resembles a mosaic of individual voices, which at times appear orchestrated – especially in the mobilizations for honest elections and subsequent demonstrations – and at other times just offer a quick estimation of the most popular topics discussed in the blogosphere. However, the fact that these discussions and articulations happen in public, which is buttressed by the sentiment of betrayal, mark a break with the disengagement practices of the late Soviet period or the period of 2000s. The solidification of the blogging activity might resemble at first the simple activity of diary-keeping but that is just seemingly the case. Blogging offers insights for human action, which carries a latent power as these very interactions revolutionized the technology of content-generation, as Everitt and Mills aptly pointed out. More specifically:

"facebook…[or] blogging software achieve nothing more exceptional technologically; they all take user input, process it and feed updated results back to your browser using standard CGI protocol or variant (Stein, 1999) developed in the early days of the web. The '2.0' part lies in the collaborative and communicative elements, in the human interactions that grow these sites semi-organically, allowing for emergent social coherence and communication."[24]

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[24] Dave Everitt and Simon Mills, "Cultural Anxiety 2.0," *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 31, no.5 (2009), 750

The above example illustrates the importance of human action in the network structure; however, the horizontal linkages that we all enjoy come at the cost of vertical control that comes in the form of certain protocols and standards of communication (i.e. the Domain Name System protocol). The fact that "the Russian-speaking blogosphere has 7.4m blogs: 6.9m personal blogs and more than half a million communities… almost twice as many as a year ago"[25] constitutes a measurement stick for the control power of the Yandex company. Nevertheless, the unintended consequence of the multiplier effect of blogging experience is the ability to re-imagine action and thus, the Russian identity.

So far, I have offered a brief sketch of the political order in Russia and its cumbersome relationship with "independent" media, which explains the emergence of blogging as an intermediary process. Here, of course, considering blogging solely as a process does not suffice in explaining its popularity and importance. Prozorov's insights on disengagement are extremely valuable because they explain why Putin's message cannot be accepted anymore as accumulating wealth has not resolved the problems the majority of the Russians face. Accumulation of wealth is strictly a private matter, as Arendt believed, and in the Russian context it reached its limits as people act in order to ensure a life *in-between* and such actions are clearly reflected on the blogosphere. I elaborate further on this "reflective" aspect of blogosphere in the following section, as well as I incorporate Mouffe's insights on rules, procedures, and *the political*.

1.3 The Blogging Interlude and the Re-discovery of the Political

"Blog, for the uninitiated, is shorthand for "Web log," online journals of thought and commentary. They feature a personal, distinctive voice, links to other sources and regular postings displayed in reverse chronological order with the newest entry first. Readers scroll down the screen to scan the

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[25] According to the Yandex Blog Search, http://download.yandex.ru/company/ya_blogosphere_report_eng.pdf

blogs, which often include a place for reader input, archives of past entries and "blogrolls," lists of

other blogs the author finds useful."[26]

Blogging in the Russian context offers an opportunity for organization of the people's dissatisfaction; therefore a sentiment/emotion that was accommodated in the people's kitchens during Soviet times can now be channeled on online platforms and viewed potentially by millions, but understood by only those who understand the language and the context of the discussions. However, the fact that the Russian blogosphere is a place "where Russians tend to communicate with Russians in Russian about Russia-related topics"[27] is potentially limited to its context, and that's precisely why it is extremely interesting. The Russian context is loaded with significance mainly because it does not make much sense outside of it. Taking into consideration the paradox(es) of action, which emanate from the multiplicity of its significance, the Russian context gives action a distinctive form, which is highly emotional and inappropriate according to the traditional liberal conceptions of Public Sphere. The importance of blogging actions, however, is debatable and has equally attracted ardent supporters and vehement critics. Nevertheless, the unique Russian blogosphere carries an emotional tone - and at times humoristic and sardonic – which invokes a reconsideration of the current political predicament. Here, the insights of Mouffe definitely address the issue of the emotional in politics.

Mouffe draws a clear line between *the political* and politics; the former refers to the "antagonism inherent in human relations … that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations" while the latter refers to all the "practices, discourses, and institutions which seek

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[26] Rachel Smolkin, "The Expanding Blogosphere," *American Journalism Review*, (June 2004/July 2004), 38
[27] Eugene Gorny, "Understanding the Real Impact of Russian Blogs" *Russian Analytical Digest* 69.9 (2009), 8

to establish a certain order…"[28] The fact that dichotomies between political and social dominate our understanding of action demonstrates the hovering predicament of liberal democracies - their lack of political understanding, which is realized not solely through reason, but via passions and emotions, as Chantal Mouffe claims. She engages the work of Carl Schmitt in order to offer a better grasp of power relations in politics, a process that liberal democracies are unable to understand because they are fervent believers of "a fully inclusive rational consensus."[29] These beliefs - if we follow the Schmittian logic - have appeared because liberals have bypassed the political sphere and instead utilized economics or ethics as their starting point of human organization. Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction is especially important as it offers a clear (and political) "we/they" distinction, which subsequently "fosters the creation of [our] identity."[30] By monopolizing humanity, the liberal democracies have declared a moral war against the constitutive "other" and completely forgot *the political*, which in Schmittian conceptualization leads to an international civil war.[31] Finally, she claims that because liberal democracies are unable to mobilize the passions of people towards "democratic objectives" such passions are mobilized in other ways in general, and the rising of the right wing parties in particular. She also urges us to forget the "dream of a reconciled world that would have overcome power and sovereignty."[32] Interestingly enough, the Russian blogosphere offers ample examples where passions play a protagonistic role on the virtual terrain - as elaborated above the sentiment of discontent and frustration with the power regime - but cannot be channeled to the traditional political space because of the nature of the political order, analyzed in the first section.

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[28] Mouffe's article on Agonistic Model of Democracy, 125
[29] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, (New York: Tourledge Taylor and Francis group, 2005), 12
[30] Mouffe, *On the Political* ,15
[31] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 77
[32] Mouffe, *Agonistic Model*, 130

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Mouffe strives to take emotions and passions seriously, since only they guide the spontaneous actions of people. However, the fact that bloggers in Russia do take their passions very seriously and blog about them does not solve the problem of the paradox of human action. The constitution of the identity "Russian blogger" is an unintended consequence of the incorporation of human relations into social network software, but to what extent can this identity be politicized? Following Mouffe's rationale any form of political organization – in her case the democratic form – is "a question of identification… and this is a complex process that takes place through a manifold of practices, discourses, and language games."[33] Furthermore, rediscovering and changing the discourse of identity constitution is possible through establishing practices, and more specifically in the Russian context, establishing the blogging practice on a daily basis as it strengthens the sense of being among others and increases the chances to "learn who we actually are only with and through others."[34] Thus, by embracing certain practices - in this case blogging - one illuminates the relationship with one self and one's passions and consequently, moulds the discourse on identity and thus the relationship with the others.

The insights of Mouffe are complemented by the research of Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd who studied blogging as a genre and identified its *kairos*, which resembles a return to the museums! More specifically:

"The genealogy of weblogs points not to the world of letters but to the early history of museums "a random

collection of strange, compelling objects, typically compiled and owned by a learned, well-off gentleman"

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[33] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 70

[34] Eli Zaretsky, "Hannah Arendt and the meaning of the Public/Private Division" in Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics ed. by Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (London: University of Minnessota Press, 1997), 223

reflecting European civilization's dazed and wondering attempts to assimilate the glut of physical data that

*science and exploration were then unleashing" (*Dibbell,2002)."[35]

Blogs unleash the potential for self-exploration, as well as "self-identification, social validation, relationship development, and social control."[36] The Russian bloggers embraced a medium with a long lineage since blogs can be traced back to: a commonplace book or book of treasury (originating in Renaissance), a museum, a clipping service or media monitoring service, a pamphlet, an editorial or opinion column, and finally a journal/diary. However, what makes Russian blogosphere unique is its time and place (*kairos*) as it channeled the kitchen talk to a virtual space that fosters processes of understanding the self through understanding the others.

Russian blogosphere is particularly interesting because it offers the most prominent example of re-imagining and re-discovering human action, now transferred to a virtual space and completed an intersection with technology. Nevertheless, the virtual aspect of blogging in particular and the "digitalization" of our daily life in general, cannot be studied in isolation from its physical components, which are people. In the sections above, I briefly mentioned the turbulent political times in Russia, as the political order begs for a reconfiguration since people reclaim their individual "spontaneity" not only in the multifaceted web of social networks but also on the streets. After the delineation of the Russian political situation, I moved to the media landscape which is dominated by the Russian state and explains why blogging became popular, as it enables the users to engage into "do-it-yourself" journalism. Blogging, in contradiction with other social media platforms, such as Facebook or Tweeter, offers ample room for self expression and self articulation, which are

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[35] Miller, Carolyn, and Dawn Shepherd . North Carolina State University, "Into the Blogosphere." Accessed April 16, 2012. http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html.
[36] Ibid.

inextricably linked with human action *as such*, as we will see in more detail in the following chapter. Moreover, the fact that such expression is occurring publicly in a public space – albeit virtual - prepares us for the next chapter which deals exclusively with the theoretical notions regarding Public Sphere.

CHAPTER 2 – BLOGOSPHERE AS PUBLIC SPHERE - THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The overarching reason why blogging – as a process/medium/message - gained prominence in academic discourses is because it grapples with a problem inherent in human affairs: the value of human action. If we concentrate on the gamut of disciplines that blogging succeeded in attracting, such as political science, media studies and digital media, as well as literature studies, the common denominator is easily detectable: an attempt to answer the question why people blog and what are their consequences/effects for the public sphere (or public places), for the evolution of media, and ultimately for politics. In the Russian case, blogging becomes even more important as it assumes a functionality of independent media, but most importantly, it offers a public sphere which hosts the "notorious" private kitchen talk publicly and allows anyone to take the virtual floor. The blog entries represent self-articulation, which is crucial for understanding action and all the restrictions that come with it. The restrictions emanate from action's complexities, as it can include all "humanity" and *as such* assume a universal façade, but in order to make sense it must be restricted to its context. As Arendt notes in the Concept of History, Hobbes' efforts to "establish a reasonable teleology of action" initiated philosophy into politics, and since then patterns of human actions have been mistaken for meaning.[37] Arendt aptly described a conflict between the individual human action expectations – the highest of such expectations would be to attain earthly immortality - and action's origins, which according to Vico (whom Arendt cites) are guided by "passions, private aims, and the satisfaction of selfish desires."[38] This very conflict characterizes the discourses about blogging especially in the quasi-authoritarian state of Russia, where the optimists exaggerate the benefits of

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[37] In Arendt's text the most prominent historian who mistakenly understood pattern as meaning was Karl Marx, as "he construed his patter this way because he was concerned with action and impatient with history." In Baehr, Peter. *The Portable Hannah Arendt.* New York: Penguin Group, 307
[38] Ibid. 307

the blogging phenomenon, while the skeptics completely disregard its processes and its importance for articulation. I depart from both of these discourses, and concentrate on the theoretical aspects of Public Sphere as understood by Arendt and Habermas. Their understandings are juxtaposed with Brown's insights on action and thoughtfulness, which I claim is produced after bloggers interact with each other publicly and explore the conflicts it entails. By the end of this chapter, the theoretical construction of public sphere will complement the understanding of *the political* urged by Mouffe.

2.1 Arendtian Public Sphere - Political Freedom and Action

The starting question is how can we know that the Russian blogosphere offers the space for re-imagining and rediscovering human action? First of all, because it started as the terrain for articulation since its first user Roman Leibov discovered this "new toy."[39] In conjunction with the practice of articulation, the public sphere for Arendt is a place that fosters "the revelatory quality of speech and action [which] comes to the fore when people are with others and neither for nor against them,"[40] meaning that public spaces become public spheres as long as people know who they are, which is solely possible after interacting with others through articulation. Moreover, her understanding of public sphere is imbricated with ancient Greek thought, which strictly demarcates the borders between the public and the private realm. The chief characteristic of interaction in the public – according to the Greeks - was action (*praxis*), which depended "upon the constant presence of others."[41] This co-existence does not entail either labor or work as these activities can be performed individually and not necessarily *with* others. Action is interlaced with articulation (*lexis*) as

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[39]Eugene Gorny, "Russian LiveJournal: National specifics in the development of a virtual community" *Russian-cyberspace.org*. May 13, 2004. http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/russ-cyb/library/texts/en/gorny_rlj.pdf
[40]Zaretsky, 223
[41] Portable Arendt, 182

she notes that "finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action."[42] Such form of action is present in the Russian blogosphere and buttressed by the presence of humor. An instance of such action was Alexander Navalny's notorious epithet for the ruling political party United Russia as "Party of Crooks and Thieves." In the blogging world, such a virtual action gained Navalny instant respect by his equals. For now, however, I embark on the intellectual exploration of politics and freedom, which according to Arendt can take place only in a public place "secured within a city … that is, to a concrete place that itself survives both those memorable deeds…"[43]

In order to delve into the characteristics of the public sphere exhibited in the blogosphere, further elaboration on action *as such* is required. Here, unraveling the Ancient Greek "deep-rooted suspicion of the private sphere"[44] becomes our starting point, since it emanates from an inherent competition between the private and the public realm. This competition is ubiquitous on the besttoday.ru website, where issues of the public have become a private matter. The Greeks, on the other hand, understood the private as "a permanent threat to the public sphere, because [it] is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation."[45] Inevitably, the Ancient Greek suspicion can be easily exonerated, as they realized that anything stemming from necessity destroys political life altogether, as well as striping power from its main characteristic, which is "human ability to act in concert."[46] Yet this ability for orchestrated action is in constant conflict with the individual conviction, which further justifies the Ancient Greek suspicion. Furthermore, this suspicion is complemented with Vico's

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[42] Ibid, 184
[43] Hannah Arendt, "Introduction into Politics" in Jerome Kohn ed. *The Promise of Politics.* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 123
[44] Hannah Arendt, The Perplexities of the Rights to Man, 42.
[45] Ibid. 42.
[46] Hannah Arendt, On Violence, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1970), 52

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concerns about action – shared by Arendt – and further complemented by re-stating a perennial question regarding action: since its origin or consequences are not known, how can we know its value? In the experiences of the city-state (*polis-kratos*) the value of action was guaranteed only in public among free individuals, who could shape the space *in-between* through articulation (*legein or logos*). At the time of Arendt's writing however, such clear distinctions between the public and the private had been inevitably changed by the invention of the atomic bomb and more significantly by its politicization. This action, according to Arendt brought into question the meaning of politics, which was already a complicated issue to begin with. Furthermore, it revealed the core of political action, which consists of conscious "cutting" ourselves off from others, without realizing that when we do so, we cut parts of ourselves.[47] Only the public realm fosters such being together, and *as such* promotes the realization of politics, whose need is overtly expressed on the Russian blogosphere and on the streets.

So far, I have elaborated on the inseparability of articulation with action and public sphere, which is of paramount importance for Arendt, not only because this used to be the Ancient Greek way of being *in-between*, but because this interaction fostered *the political* and tamed orchestrated action driven by conviction. More succinctly, this specific interaction allowed the human potential for freedom to be fully realized. This very potential comprises the material of politics, according to Arendt. Thus, in order to realize this potential, the prerequisites of labor, work, and action must be fulfilled first.

The human potential for freedom is realized when action is visible from different perspectives, which in my empirical case occurs not only though articulation but through the visual

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[47] Zaretsky, 219

representation of the blogger's perspective: pictures or multimedia material. But in order to get to freedom, Arendt claims that free individuals must gain independence from labor and work. According to her thread of thought, laboring constitutes a repetitive activity which lasts as long as the individual life does, while work does fulfill its purpose as soon as the object is finished. Both of those activities can be sheltered in the private realm - in the Ancient Greek *polits-kratos* this "sheltering" came in the form of enslavement - as they constitute the biological life cycle of laboring and consuming. However, action cannot be restricted to the private realm, simply because its consequences are unpredictable: to act also means to take initiative or to begin, which in the private realm is unfathomable due to the power configuration of the household, or at least that was the case for the Ancient Greeks. The rules of interaction are inextricably linked with a particular public space and a clear guarantee of freedom of movement, which ensures the "ability to see the same thing from various standpoints in the human world."[48] This is at the core of the *bios politikos* (political way of life according to Aristotle), which makes the different convictions that prompt common action visible from different perspectives. This understanding of politics is easily complemented with the insights of Mouffe, who reminded us of the antagonism inherent in public affairs. In the case of Ancient Greeks – whom Arendt recalls - antagonism dominated their political affairs mainly because they understood quite well the precariousness of that space *in-between*. Nevertheless, only that place guarantees a variety of perspectives and aspects as the worst that can happen is "the end of the common world…when it is seen only under one aspect and it permitted to present itself in only one perspective."[49]

Arendtian understanding of action, public space, and politics have been offered in order to delineate their immense entanglement; however, I have not elaborated substantially on the rules of

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[48] Introduction to politics, 168
[49] Ibid, 205

(inter)action. These rules dictated the conditions of entering the public sphere, according to which the most important prerequisite was to master over the household. More specifically, "to be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself.

Understanding the rules leads us to the understanding of identities of a citizen, a political actor, and a private individual. Here, Arendt's insights on identity construction are extremely useful since we learn who we really are only with and through others, or in Arendt's words "the revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore when people are with others and neither for nor against them."[50] The constitution of identity is absolutely unfathomable in the absence of emotional responses and passions, which also initiate the various conflicts that characterize *the political*. Furthermore, as mentioned above, action for Arendt is seen with relation to labor and work in order to underline the salience of individual diversity and creativity, rather than just "the importance of living one's life in terms of communal goals."[51] This point is of paramount significance since for her politics are inextricably linked with the existence of human plurality manifesting itself publicly. Of course, linking her insights solely with the constitution of individual identities would be derisive, as she was concerned more with political action *as such* and the world of men, which "comes into being only if there are perspectives."[52] However, in order to understand politics – as a relationship with others - a prior understanding of the self is required. Especially, in the case of Russian blogosphere such understandings are closely tied together.

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[50] Zaretsky, 180
[51] Zaretsky, 223
[52] Introduciton to politics, 175

Arendt's preoccupation with human action and the commons – known as the good life in the *polis* for Ancient Greeks – helped her detect a major difference between the polis and our current existence: the rise of the social. The social realm emerged when labor – "sheltered" by the private realm – was permitted in the public and "totally changed the whole inhabited world."[53] But the danger is not to be found at the emergence of the social realm but in its insatiable growth on the expense of both private and public spheres.[54] Furthermore, in the Russian case the social has constituted itself as omnipresent, and taking into account Prozorov's insights from the previous chapter, the insatiable nature of the social substituted completely the political realm in Russia, albeit not without consequences. The major consequence of such "substitution" is that political matters or issues concerning the public became a personal issue, manifested in the blogging experience. The emergence of the blogosphere constitutes a "way out" from the current Russian political predicament and expresses the need for public *in-between* space.

2.2 Habermasian Public Sphere – Cementing the Social in Public

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, major complexities are embedded in action since "humanity" *as such* can assume a universal façade but in order to make sense has to be restricted to its context. The work of Habermas clearly demonstrates this universal side of action, because his idea of communicative reason "projects the performative ideal of the polis"[55] to the entire world. The case of Russian blogging restricts such projections as it accentuates the paramount importance of the context. Furthermore, Habermasian "take" on the public sphere has influenced not only the circles of philosophers and political scientists but media critics as well. To the degree that Habermasian criteria of critical rational debate are used in research without further reflection or

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[53]Portable Arendt, 197
[54]Portable Arendt, 198
[55] Martin B., Matustik, *Jurgen Habermas: A philosophical – Political Profile.* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 233

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analysis.[56] Such direct applications do not leave room for self-exploration, which may happen in a variety of ways. In the Habermasian approach the public sphere is an ideal recalled from the past, tailored in accordance with the rise of the bourgeoisie and treated as both ideology and normativity. The former encompasses the liberal dogma of an ideal public sphere ruled by "situated reason" which guides mutual learning,[57] while the latter addresses the account of specific "normal" practices the individuals performed in that particular space and more importantly in particular time. I characterize the first category as "ideological" because ultimately, what started as a historical-sociological unraveling of the liberal public sphere, has transformed into a claim that can potentially explain everything. For Habermas it is communicative rationality that takes place *in-between* people, but what if people do not speak the same conceptual language? Among the criteria that constitute the public, *lexis* and *praxis* are still present, but they are "used" in a completely different manner.

In Habermas analysis, the liberal public sphere is situated between civil society and the state, and the bourgeoisie are described as the leading class of the civil society altogether, at least for some time. He claims that the bourgeois public sphere stabilized around 13th century, when capitalism buttressed the power structure among Italian city-states and their society, but simultaneously unleashed the "elements of new commercial relationships: the traffic in commodities and news created by early capitalist long distance trade."[58] These historical insights are important because they demonstrate how mercantilist policies gained power between the authorities and the subjects,[59] which consequently led to the prominence of the bourgeois avant-garde. The faculty of publicity played a crucial point in this power-shift, as it was chiefly monopolized by the aristocratic society or

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[56] Thomas Poell, "Conceptualizing forums and blogs as public sphere" in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 242

[57] Fred Dallmayr, "Conversation across boundaries: Political theory and global diversity" *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 30 (June 2001,342

[58] Jurgen, Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 1989),15

[59] Ibid,18

in the French case the *Ancien Regime,* which presided over the court. The court at the historical vantage point of Habermas, acquired an adversary as soon as the market forces started their course: the space of the town, which constituted "the life center of the civil society."[60] The town succeeded in rebelling against the court only because the bourgeoisie adopted and mastered the faculty of publicity through learning the "the art of crucial-rational public debate through its contact with the elegant world."[61] But the development of the bourgeois public sphere is compelling as it acquired a peculiar duality which had *political* and *apolitical* dimensions due to the polarization such development entailed.

The bourgeoisie were both private individuals – as they had families and owned property - and suddenly acquired a public status, since they served primarily as a "point of reference to [its] political self-understanding."[62] This duality insinuates the claim that the social is already imbedded in the bourgeois public sphere, albeit in its latent form as private activities acquire a public meaning, which are inherent in the mercantilist practices. Its twofold arrangement instigated further problems such as the legal protection that bourgeois activities were in need. As private individuals, they could primarily accumulate wealth, but as property owners they were required to seek protection from the court and push for a re-formulation of the laws, which lead to the initial puzzle Habermas had: the "contradiction between the liberal public sphere's constitutive catalogue of basic rights of man and their de-facto restriction to a certain class of men."[63] This initial puzzle however, is transformed to an ideology, which prescribes standardized rules of interaction in public. Thus, he completely disregards human spontaneity, which in Dallmayr words is called "creative intervention."[64]

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[60]Ibid, 29
[61]Ibid, 29
[62]Ibid, 29
[63] Ibid, 7
[64]Dallmayr, 343

There are three main criteria that were met at the salons or cafes: social intercourse was realized in absence of laws of market and the laws of the state[65], the intercourse was emanating from common concerns among private individuals[66], and finally, the public was inclusive in principle as "in public everyone was entitled to judge."[67] These criteria prepare the ground for the bourgeois subjectivity, as not everyone was really entitled to judge but merely those who read about the things that were equally concerning others. In the case of the Russian bloggers, this element of intellectual solidarity is present but it definitely manifests itself following different criteria, echoing strongly the ideas of Mouffe about *the political*. Yet these criteria delineate a liberal public sphere which stems from privacy and was both "polemical and private."[68] Habermas concentrated on the bourgeoisie because they were communicating through letter writing quite extensively. Through this writing process "the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity"[69] and they pioneered - always according to Habermas - the "experimental complex of audience oriented privacy"[70] which crossed into the political realm of the public sphere. The consequences of this "cross-over" however, are the absolute solidification of a bourgeois understanding of the public sphere, which is reflected in the legal forms that "*had to be general and abstract to have a peculiar obviousness for privatized individual who by communicating with each other in the public sphere of letters, confirmed each other's subjectivity.*"[71] Thus, the rules of interaction are based on a "peculiar obviousness" obvious only to the right class or people with the right subjectivity. Habermas imposes this subjectivity on anyone who wants to engage into a critical-rational debate, which is the only way to establish consensus and by doing so, he does not

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[65]Habermas, 36
[66]Habermas, 37
[67]Habermas, 40
[68]Habermas, 53
[69] Ibid, 48
[70] Ibid, 52
[71] Ibid, 53

expand the political sphere but rather abets the social realm, in which as Arendt believed "excellence has become anonymous."[72]

The subjectivity formed through letter-writing cannot be equated with the cultivation of the intimate, but rather a departure from it, as it stepped out of the intimate realm of the family, which by then had been fully institutionalized.[73] However, *the social* permeates the "public" not only though the critical debates that take place *in-between* these private individuals, but also through the understanding that they acquire about themselves through exploring their subjectivity, as Habermas notes. They were interacting in the salon - or any other place that hosted a critical conversation – and consequently, they gained importance as a class since it attained its self-understanding and self-articulation through adopting the principle of publicity and using it against the state. The reason of their success –- lies in their dual identity: they were fully privatized individuals (who appeared in public) and "owners of goods and persons and [one the other they were] one human being among others."[74] Apart from interacting publicly in the market as property owners, they were also extremely private as they comprised and promoted the institution of family. The duality spotted by Habermas is quite relevant for the case of the Russian bloggers, who are using publicity against the state with the help of the Internet. There is an important insight here, since Habermas put forward the idea that private sphere "challenged the authority of the monarch through interiorized human experience."[75] In the Russian case, the "interiorization" of the private sphere was forced by the state in the first place, through promoting family values and stability as noted in the first chapter. However, in order to understand the phenomenon of the Russian blogging process specifically, Habermas' insights are more or less inadequate as the Russian situation crossed from the realm of

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[72] Portable Arendt, 198
[73] Haberams, 45
[74] Habermas, 55
[75] Im referring to the institutionalization of the family, Habermas, 53

the civil society to the realm of *the political*. This blogging cross-over does not exhibit a rational standard for critical debate but rather demonstrates "spontaneity" of human action. Moreover the Russian blogging case shows that public concerns became a personal matter, so the lines separating the public and the private are even more entangled in the Russian context.

In this section I have shown the universal aspect of action promoted by the insights of Habermas. His concept of the public sphere starts with the bourgeoisie reclaiming their own perspective in public, but eventually suggests that only through practice of reason – the rational debate – public sphere can be constituted. Furthermore, I elaborated on the aspect of publicity and *the social* that appears in the salon, in order to point out that even Habermas cannot escape non-rational processes embedded in public sphere, as well as their impact on the constitution of subjectivity. Publicity is especially important as it permeates the Russian blogosphere, as well as constitutes both *lexis* and *praxis*. Throughout the processes of interaction, Habermas overtly accentuates the importance of the "rational communicative action" which sets him apart from the Arendtian insights on the public sphere. For her, freedom gains priority, and it is inextricably linked with action, freedom, and plurality of perspectives instead of the prescribed criteria for achieving the "situated reason." The following section grapples again with the premise of human action but from a different perspective and introduces thoughtfulness and responsibility both articulation and action necessitate.

2.3 Insights of Wendy Brown – Public Sphere and Thoughtfulness

The account of political genealogy by Wendy Brown fits easily with the Arendtian understanding of the "miraculous" quality of action as well as with the status of the citizens, as it forces us to rethink our political predicament and re-articulate the need for a space for such re-thinking. In her elaboration of genealogy, Brown states that it "introduces discontinuity into our

very being" and with it re-discovers the "political task of know who we are, knowing our ill bodies."[76] Blogging becomes important because it offers a dual articulation – that with the self and with the others – and in conjunction with the demonstrations it buttresses the Russian urgency for a free space "that enables the interrogation of political and historical premises."[77] Arendt dedicated her intellectual energies to the question of whether political actions have any meaning at all, to which the response was: *"The miracle of freedom is inherent in this ability to make a beginning, which itself is inherent in the fact that every human being, simply by being born into a world that was there before him and will be after him, is himself a new beginning."[78]* Arendt concludes that if politics is the realm of freedom then we indeed have the right to expect miracles as to act *as such* is to begin something new, as the people in Moscow did. The realm of the miracles however needs to be protected and here Brown's account extremely insightful in the theoretical preparation for understanding blogging.

In the previous section I referred to this peculiar legal arrangement that the bourgeoisie forged when they entered the "public sphere" as fully individualized persons. As noted above, the bourgeois intervention ended in the creation of one social-welfare state, which for Arendt was a disaster since on the legal side of the argument - as she elaborated in the Perplexities of the Rights of Man - humanity as an ideal substitutes both nature and history or more pointedly "*the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself*;"[79] which is impossible. Here, of course Arendt clearly shows that at particular historical point an ideal – in this case humanity – substituted a practice of legal protection, which in the work of Habermas it has a specific agent behind it, which is the bourgeoisie. Brown's careful approach to Socratic loyalty to laws emerges as particularly contemporary and fitting between Arendtian and Habermasian insights

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[76] Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 109
[77] Ibid, Brown 119
[78] Introduction into Politics, Hannah Arendt, 113
[79] Portable Arendt, 39

on the public sphere. Furthermore, Brown's insights interleave with the issues of the perpetual divides of universal/individual and public/private, and present them in such a way they resonate with our contemporary political predicament and offer some room for meaningful contemplation. These divides are present in both Arendt and Habermas, as free individuals versus private individual for the former and privatized individuals acting in public for the latter, which preside over our empirical case of Russian Blogosphere.

The Socratic loyalty to laws is particularly contemporary in the Russian case, as protesters and bloggers equally have been citing the 31st Article of the Russian constitution quite extensively. In her consideration of the *Apology* and *Crito*, laws play a significant role as they take the role of "parents" and preserve whatever stands for the integrity of the collectivity;[80] while in the Russian case, the appeal to laws becomes an articulation both on the blogosphere and on the streets. More importantly, laws offer the fracture through which people's (*narod* in Russian) voices are penetrated and subsequently, re-enforced virtually through the blogging medium. For Brown, the moment when Socrates refuses to escape from his death captures his attempt to render politically potent a space (*the private*), and activity (*philosophizing, critique*), and relations between citizens; ordinarily conceived as un-political or irrelevant to the political.[81] Socrates renders a lesson through example, as Arendt would have claimed, and his performance points exactly to the reconsideration of our political state and perhaps, to its redemption. The beginning of such redemption in my case started from a blogging space that merges the public and the private realm; the activity of blogging as such which is potentially used for multi-layered discussion, self-expression, and articulation; and finally, the relationships that are forged on the visual terrain (and on the streets). As Brown concludes in her re-consideration of Socrates' act, the laws embody thoughtfulness. The lack of thoughtfulness has

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[80]*Edgework*, 23
[81]*Edgework*, 23

been equated by Arendt with evil and in the blogging/protesting case the appeal to law claim thoughtfulness from the point of view of the political power configuration. The problem is that the particular political configuration described in the first chapter rarely listens.

The congealment of a space (*the private*) with a particular activity (*philosophizing, critique*) and relations among individual citizens, as well as intellectual and political agents, complicates further the realization of a public sphere *proper*. Habermas claims that the only "proper" public sphere is realized through communicative rationality, which is far away from Arendtian ideas about freedom of movement as the crucial element of the realization of the political sphere. With Brown, freedom acquires historical consciousness and is seen as a possibility as she grapples with major political signifiers of our time. Her elaboration on the political signifier of "conviction" is prioritized as it resonates with the discontents of Mouffe regarding the work of Habermas, as well as it describes the attitude of the Russian politics today, where the main conviction encapsulated in the blogosphere (and on the streets) is the conviction for acknowledgement by the regime and eradication of corruption. Furthermore, conviction is what constitutes the impetus for power, found in orchestrated action arising from a specific purpose, according to Arendt. Thus, Brown's elaboration on conviction becomes an intellectual "hub" for the ideas elaborated so far, namely, action, public sphere, politics, freedom, and articulation. Furthermore, Brown theory or "*theoria [which] emerged as a term for seeing enriched by journeying*" presupposes that "*there is often self-knowledge buried in places remote from our own.*"[82]

Brown's elaboration on conviction assumes the form of genealogy as introduced by Nietzsche, who created the necessary distance between us and our knowledge;[83] which in itself

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[82]*Edgework*, 19
[83]*Politics Out of History*, 95

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constitutes a journey. Furthermore, with a genealogical approach to our convictions and values we basically "disrupt coherent identities, both individual and collective"[84] as it offers us alternative possibilities of being and acting, which not necessarily comply with existent rules. The genealogical turn instead helps us to re-invent the rules and contemplate on our historical position, as it introduces discontinuity into our very being.[85] Furthermore, this very discontinuity enforces the political task of knowing who we are, according to Brown, and is complemented with considering how a "free space" is created and why. She reminds us that the organization of space as such is a technique of power[86], however, a free space that enables the interrogation of political and historical premises[87] and such free space manifests itself in the Russian blogosphere.

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[84]Ibid, 99
[85]Ibid, 109
[86]Ibid, 117
[87]Ibid. 119

CHAPTER 3 – BLOGOSPHERE AS PUBLIC SPHERE – THE EMPIRICAL CASE OF besttoday.ru

So far I have shown the main differences of the public sphere's concept seen through the lens of Arendt and Habermas. For Arendt, the plurality of human perspectives is an indispensable part for constituting public sphere, action, and politics. While for Habermas, this plurality of perspectives is suspended and instead standard rational rules of (inter)action are promoted. For Arendt, "public" is a place where free individuals co-exist through articulation-action, which enables the realization of different individual perspectives. On the other hand, Habermas treats "publicity" as a tool that was used against the state by the bourgeoisie. The re-interpretation of the law's role and the importance of a free place where contemplation can be achieved, was incorporated via Brown's work on political genealogy, which ties together Arendtian understanding of action, the danger of adopting standardized rules of interaction – as happens in the work of Habermas – and the importance of thoughtfulness/responsibility that Mouffian re-consideration of *the political* necessitates.

The blog entries from the besttoday.ru website comprise my main material for constructing the anatomy of political action as well as answering the question of whether the blogosphere creates a political sphere or whether it is just an instance of one public sphere among others in the current Russian reality. I am following a content analysis of the blog entries; however my analysis is not restricted to pure linguistic investigation of the blogging content. I treat content as a "relation" embedded in the linguistic expression - a relation between bloggers in the blogosphere and their dynamics outside of it, as the contextual change plays a paramount role in understanding the constitution of public sphere. The blog entries that appear on the website are roughly divided into three categories: **personal** - where the blogger shares his/her thoughts on a topic, reminiscent of the opinion piece in the traditional forms of media; **discussion-generating** - which are usually brief

and prod for further comments; and professional **journalist** blogs - accompanied with a hyperlink to their publication websites, which usually correspond to the online version of newspapers such as *Novaya Gazeta*. Apart from the blog entries, the website includes multimedia material – pictures, videos, cartoons – that comprise an integral part of the website architecture, pointing again to the direction of the museums, as suggested by Miller and Shepherd. Furthermore, such virtual composition exemplifies the plurality of perspectives that appear freely and co-exist with others.

In order to organize the empirical part into a coherent whole, I am moving backwards temporarily, so I can capture the empirical manifestations[88] of the blog-entries as well as reflect on their context. I concentrate on key demonstrations before the elections - namely on the Febraury 4 demonstration and the Febraury 26 "Big White Circle" flash mob - and after the elections' result including "March of the Million", "Writers' March", and "Occupy Arbat." Moreover, the incident against NTV channel – demonstrating the popular discontent with the media situation – blogged extensively on the website is also integrated in my analysis to complement the variety of perspectives this virtual terrain offers.

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[88] Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, 29

3.1 Blogging as Action

The blog dedicated to the march on February 4 has the form of a "discussion-prober"[89] which offers a title, a main picture, and short description of the event which is followed by different opinions/accounts/experiences of individuals who participated in the demonstration and subsequently, shares their impressions, pictures, and thoughts of the event. This section is not initiated by an individual blogger but instead is the production of the website's managers, who read in advance the blog postings, compile them in one titled section, and leave space for further discussion on the virtual space of besttoday.ru. In this case, the blogging as process becomes a dual articulation – the expression of specific real event and the relation of the blogger to the event itself but in retrospect. The articulation evolves from a temporary fixing meaning to a second phase, where the connection of the meaning becomes attached to the social relation of all those who are against Putin-regime. Here, if we recall the insights of Arendt, the bloggers articulate freely in "virtual" presence of others, which is not only the embodiment of action but also of the initiation of public sphere, as all the blog entries-expressions are archived and can be recalled at any time from the website. Instances of such articulations follow the mantra "finding the right words at the right moment" which for Arendt is action. Such cases include Navalny's description of United Russia as the *"Party of Crooks and Thieves"* as well as the slogan *"Za chesniye vibory"* (In favor of fair elections) and *"Rossiya bez Putina"* (Russia without Putin), as well as the slogan *"Ne raskachivaite lodky nashy krisy toshnit"* (Don't rock the boat – our rat gets nauseous).

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[89] "Discussion-prober's title was "In Favor for Fair Elections," http://besttoday.ru/subjects/957.html

The "Big White Circle" demonstration was also blogged as a "discussion-prober," where again the account of the personal experience was predominant.[90] As a result, the articulation realized on besttoday.ru after the demonstration resembles a mosaic where every blog-entry is attached to a specific "who", which according to Arendt is a prerequisite for any meaningful action. Moreover, the articulation of these subjective experiences fosters a stronger connection to the social relations realized on the blogosphere, as it offers an easy way to channel any emotions/impressions instantly on a popular virtual terrain. These two discussion-probers serve as starting points in our narrative, as they were the first ones which gained prominence and brought people together under an all encompassing conviction against corruption and in favor of "fair elections." Here, an important observation is that the signs produced by the protesters carried a quick-right-to-the-point message were also used by the drivers in the "Big White Circle" flash mob where the anti-Putin slogans were compiled on besttoday.ru. Such actions exemplify the need for self clarification and creativity, as both of these images demonstrate the omnipresence of humor (the first image on the left roughly means "Putin stinks" while the second one means "Thief go away")

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[90] Key blogger drugoi's account http://drugoi.livejournal.com/3702913.html as well as another user called woma-n http://woma-n.livejournal.com/25861.html

The above demonstration exemplified the use of one particular symbol, as the participants decided to wear white ribbons in solidarity response. Putin openly described the white ribbons as "condoms"[91] which generated humoristic responses on the website, depicting Putin wearing a condom on his suit, which is another instance of action through public articulation. Of course, satirical cartoons existed since the invention of the newspaper, but what makes the difference in the blogging case is that action is generated and communicated instantly online and organically incorporated into the online-discussion, resulting in reconfiguration of the virtual space of the website. Furthermore, such humoristic intervention is completely disconnected from the Habermasian ideal of communication rationality crucial for the constitution of the liberal public sphere, as humor inherently appeals to emotion. Here, Mouffe's insights once again become relevant since humor reveals the importance of contextualism, which encompasses: "The forms of life in which we find ourselves [and] are themselves held together by a network of pre-contractual agreements, without which there would be no possibility of mutual understanding or therefore, of disagreement."[92] Furthermore, such insights complement the importance of plurality in opinions that are not necessarily in agreement with each other. The blogging terrain brings the importance of "context" to the fore, which is closely linked with the creation of a unique public sphere. Any public

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[91]Putin's interview was linked to the main website: http://besttoday.ru/subjects/890.html
[92]*The Democratic Paradox,* 64

sphere in order to emerge and ordeal the passage of time has to be always contextual as it entails specific procedures such as "agreements in judgments" that already involve substantial ethical commitments.[93]

In the Russian context blogging actions amplified and re-enforced the actions on the streets, nevertheless, they are significantly deviating from each other, as in the case of the streets refers closely to the "melancholy haphazardness" characterizing action as we cannot know its consequences. Nevertheless, The blogging articulations-actions on the other hand force us to contemplate on the self and especially, on the constitution of identity in our ever-growing and all-encompassing digital daily life: following the mantra "we are what we do" *with others*. Therefore the blogging entries exhibit the characteristics of Arendtian political action, as well as the elements of *the political* discussed by Mouffe. Habermasian insights, on the other are rather inadequate in understanding of the Russian context because they exclude the modes of "subversive/creative intervention…[which operates] on pre-discursive levels"[94] which humor is. Of course, his insights on action which are constituted by *lexis* and *praxis* are important through the faculty of the publicity, but such "additions" have historical/sociological significance that cannot be transposed on the current empirical case. Yet Habermasian historical insights will be extensively used in the section referring to *the social*, as he identified the *apolitical* development of the public sphere reflecting the complexities immanent in public sphere. Moreover, his explanations highlight the enmeshment of the private realm in the blogosphere/pubic sphere, which are also in line with Mouffian insights on the emotional dimension of *the political*.

The demonstrations in February carried a clear message for fair elections, the demonstration on May 6 and the subsequent organized protest "Occupy Abai" – the sign of this protest says "It is

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[93]*The Democratic Paradox,* 67
[94] Dallmayr, 343

not a protest, it's a process"[95] – shows the coherence of the anti-Putin message (as many participants carried signs such as "I rock the boat"[96]). The persistence of the participants evoked violent clashes with the riot police – OMON – which introduces interpellation in our content analysis or the rigidity which is a characteristic of Putin's regime and can be maintained only through violence. Here, multimedia material played a crucial role in making the accounts of the participants credible as well as underlined the spontaneity of the organized demonstrations, which is omnipresent not only on the streets but also on the blogosphere since each blogger has his/her own personal tone even though he/she shares the identity of a "blogger." The multifaceted web of social networks adds more spontaneity to the blogging process, as well as emphasizes the rapidity and the instant nature of virtual interactions in general and blogging in particular. Spontaneity is a key thematic node that will be addressed in the following section, where I approach Russian blogging process/message as a "relation."

3.2 Blogging and *the Political*

Following Hannah Arendt's insights, the political is constituted *in-between* free individuals who are being together neither for nor against each other. It also resonates with Mouffe's understanding of the political, in which passions play a predominant role. If one had to impose some order, one always privileges emotion, passion, and selfish desire[97] because it is the catalyst of any action; in the blogging case the same passion that pushed people to the streets made other people write and reflect upon these experiences through blogs, the only catch is that many of them were blogging before the events and gained momentum when the protests started. That place *in-*

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[95] http://falanster.livejournal.com/456621.html, but was re-blogged by one of the prominent Russian bloggers Oleg Kozyrev on: http://oleg-kozyrev.livejournal.com/4142762.html

[96] Ilya Yashin's twitter account https://twitter.com/#!/IlyaYashin/status/201626446618296320

[97] Portable Arendt, 307

between is always violent due to the power struggles orchestrated human action bears. One can assume that following the Arendtian ideas about public space, we need individuals who are equal to each other and compete towards the "aristo" (the best) and in the Russian case, such individuals are the specific bloggers who are present in every virtual discussion and every street demonstration. This would be simply wrong, because the bloggers also share the identity of a protestor, which makes the decision about who is equal and who is not rather difficult. And yet, the blogosphere is unique as a genre and offers a spatial representation for the articulation process *as such*. This function of articulation is emanating from the absence of independent media carrier, and that's precisely the reason why professional journalist's postings are omnipresent on the besttoday.ru website. Thus, the context of the blogging "chunks" is not only defined by the plurality of the voices the bloggers eagerly share, but also by the struggles for attention different "traditional news" agencies seek, as well as it is defined by the multimedia materials that are integral parts of the postings and blog entries.

Independent media – in the traditional sense the best example would be *Novaya Gazeta* – has been around, but what makes the difference in today's situation is the new potential given to any individual to generate content, accentuating the predominance of the individual voice in blogging. For now, however, I want to concentrate on the role of the media in blogosphere, as it paves the way for a better understanding of *the political*. Furthermore, this turn enables me to see beyond the violent pictures that were circulated on the website following the "March of the Million" and "OccupyArbat," but instead draw attention to the unique processes of articulation blogging offers. Thus, the blogging terrain covered media controversies such as the notorious case of NTV showing a "documentary" entitled the "Anatomy of the Protest", where the main message was people were protesting on the streets because they were paid in biscuits. The "mockumentary" first generated discussions online and subsequently, prodded for collective actions against the channel, which also

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carried a humoristic tone. Moreover, the case of the blogger Robenkova, who exposed how a top manager from Gozbank evaded justice after almost killing a two-year old child, equally highlights the potency of free public articulation, which unavoidably is political since anyone who re-posted the story will face criminal charges.[98] Here, it is an instance of initial articulation/action, which firstly demonstrates that the consequences of our actions are indeed unknown to us; secondly, and most importantly, even if the consequences are unknown as long as there is a conviction behind it, the need to act prevails and *the political* manifests itself through the discussions/postings. Moreover, it also justifies Mouffe's discontent with the Habermasian ideas of critical public sphere as in the Russian case "every political act is a personal matter." (The following pictures were circulated after the "Anatomy of Protest" mockumentary was shown: the first on the left depicts a girl with a sign, which roughly translates to "So NTV, where are my biscuits?")

As analyzed in the first chapter, the political order has changed and the only persistent element in the current power constellation is Putin himself. He still supports that stability is to be found in the "wealth" as discussed before, however, it is overtly felt in the blogosphere that such claims do not hold anymore. The people who generate their own virtual content do so in order to be

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[98] Svetalana Robenkova's blog: http://robenkova.livejournal.com/271616.html

publicly with others, something that is unprecedented for the Russian blogosphere of LiveJournal –

the most popular blogging service in Russia. "Publicity as a tool" according to Habermas, is not the

driving force behind the articulation-action (even though it is used) because issues regarding

corruption or state-agencies' malpractice were known and written about in newspapers before. It is

the public co-existence and emergence of different perspectives that fosters such actions. The

besttoday.ru website signifies a change in context, where blogging *as such* is taken seriously as

articulation-action, supported by instances of discussion-probers analyzed above. The protest cannot

be isolated from the blogging process because the categorical metaphors used, the slogans that were

publicized, and humoristic statements all signify articulation which is inextricably linked with action,

and the relationship with the self and others which is expressed through blogging. Habermasian

ideas about articulating subjectivity through letter writing echoes the functionality of blogging, but

does not capture its potential in the Russian context. Nevertheless, his historical/sociological

insights offer ample room for analyzing *the social*, whose momentum matches that of *the political*.

Linking the two together is going to advance the claim that public sphere in Russia operates in a

museum-like manner, where different conceptual perspectives are congealed in one, as a response to

the self-exploration.

3.3 Blogging and *the Social*

As noted in the theoretical framework, for Habermas, the public sphere is about

communicative rationality, which takes place *in-between* people – in his case the bourgeoisie - who

met the standard criteria of such rationality. These standards including the status of the bourgeois

avant-garde as both private individuals and as leading agents of the civil society who used publicity

against the institution of the court, led to the dual development of the public sphere that Habermas

is advocating: a public sphere in a *political* form and the public sphere in *apolitical* form. The latter

apolitical development is reminiscent of the disengagement politics discussed in the first chapter. Of

course for Habermas the apolitical was constituted by the aspect of the bourgeois self-understanding as property owners and human beings *per se,*[99] while in the Russian case the apolitical was the embodiment of distance from the commons altogether. It was further advanced by Putin's rhetoric and actions – as discussed in the first chapter – as he achieved to ensure his own political survival among the different entrepreneurial and criminal groups through declaring the survival for the society as a "whole" which initially worked. In this case we have a clear instance of a political sovereign forging his meaning with the assistance of *the social.* These interlaced concepts – the political and the social - are further complicated by the distortion that the faculty of the publicity has undergone, which constitutes both *lexis* and *praxis*. Such "blurring of the lines" is explicitly philosophized by Habermas but are experienced in the empirics of the blog entries on besttoday.ru differently, as both social and political acquire their own perspective.

The main discontent with the Habermasian criteria of rational communication is that it completely disregards aesthetical of everyday life, which is manifested on the website not only through the humoristic remarks, cartoons, and sarcastic songs that are posted on individual blogs; but the very articulated-actions by bloggers treat humor as an integral part of their articulation. For example one of the most popular bloggers, according to the besttoday.ru rating, Malgin, quite often incorporates songs of humoristic content.[100] Moreover, the very categorical metaphors and slogans that were used at the streets and re-posted through social media, and more importantly, were incorporated in blog-entries carry both a humoristic tone, with a tinge of irony. As Dallmayr notes, for Habermas guiding concepts for our mutual learning – the linguistic turn – is truth, rationality, and justification.[101] The blogs that comprise my research do not abide to these concepts, but rather to the experiences the bloggers (and the protesters) share and the convictions that they forged

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[99] Habermas, 29
[100] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ch6onkGOrFQ
[101] Dallmayr, 342

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throughout their life. Publicity, which is also another theoretical nodal point in the Habermasian communicative action, is also problematic, as private individuals engaged openly with the accumulation of wealth and sought legal protection.

Publicity is especially important as it permeates the Russian blogosphere, as well as constitutes both *lexis* and *praxis*, as the blog entries and discussions that appear on besttoday.ru become publicized material due to the online archiving functionality. However, publicity for Arendt acquires a peculiar potency; especially as the social has "conquered the public realm,"[102] substituted "behavior" for "action and bureaucracy (the role of the nobody) substituted personal rulership,"[103]as well promoted conformism that "allows only one interest and one opinion"[104] Another characteristic of Russian society is that private matters are "permitted to appear in public."[105] An example of the social aspect was the discussion-prober section dedicated to the provocative dress of a teen on her high school graduation,[106] which definitely captures the shift between behavior and action, but even in this "mundane" discussion the girl's behavior demonstrates the need for public accommodation of a personal preference (in this case the choice of the dress). Thus, this instance shows how *the social* in Russia also entails its own specifics and is restricted to its contextual layers. Furthermore, such discussions offer the opportunity to discuss the "social degradation" of the Russian society – for example teen promiscuity and the role of parenthood – which ultimately point to the institution of the family and its responsibilities in shaping subjectivity. Habermas claims that society and state permeated into each other and as a result "the family became ever more private and the world of work and organization ever more public."[107] Such insights show how the political and the apolitical development of public sphere discussed in the second chapter, was further complicated by the role

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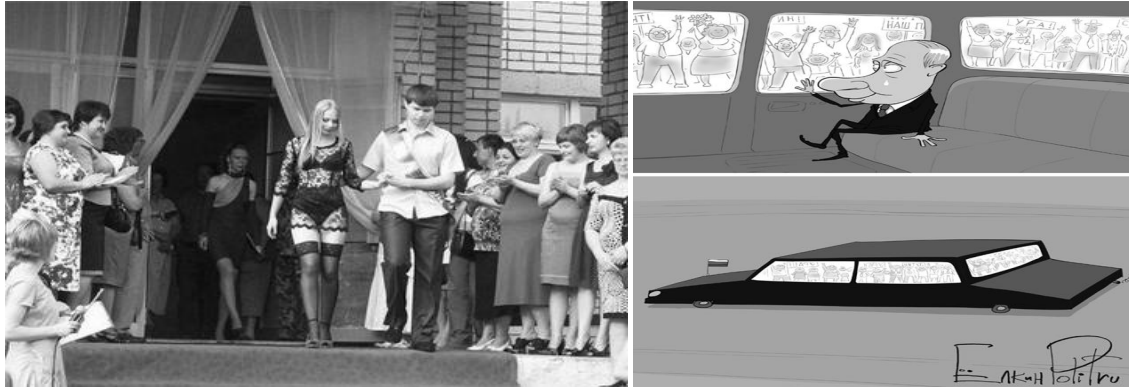[102] Hannah Arendt, Portable, 193
[103] Portable Hannah Arendt, 196
[104] Ibid. 196
[105] Ibid, 197
[106] http://besttoday.ru/subjects/1138.html
[107] Habermas,152

of the social-state. Furthermore, the aspect of publicity for both Habermas and Arendt is connected with subjectivity, which dwells both in the social and the political realm. An illustration follows:

The "Russian blogger" identity is an unintended consequence of the incorporation of human relations into social network software, as mentioned in the first chapter. Considering Mouffe's insights for a moment, any form of political organization is "a question of identification... and this is a complex process that takes place through a manifold of practices, discourses, and language games."[108] These complex processes are presented on the besttoday.ru website and manifest themselves through different articulation/actions imbued with humor and repetition of the phrase "bloggers discuss" which re-enforces the identity even further complemented with blogging as a practice on a daily basis as it increases the chances to "learn who we actually are only with and through others."[109] Thus, by embracing certain practices - in this case blogging - one illuminates the relationship with one's self and one's passions and consequently, moulds both a *social* and *political* identity. The social identity is congealed by the social forces which also acquired publicity, namely the self-articulation that blogging offers as genre. The constitution of the political identity is entangled with the social, because of the blogging unique genealogy as museums "a random collection of strange, compelling objects, typically compiled and owned by a learned, well-off

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[108] *The Democratic Paradox*, 70
[109] Zaretsky, 223

gentleman"[110] However, what makes the besttoday.ru website unique is its time and place (*kairos*) as it channeled the kitchen talk to a virtual space that fosters processes of understanding the self through understanding the others.

In conclusion, *the social* and *the political* are closely interwoven and their coexistence is not necessarily mutually exclusive. My analysis of the discussion-probers so far, I purposefully excluded the "Writers' March" (protest and blogging action) as it was a direct challenge to the possibility of fines for public gathering. This is the instance where there was a direct appeal to Article 31 of the Russian constitution. Furthermore, during the demonstration which was followed by Occupy Arbat, there were instances where NTV channel representative was scolded by a woman who promised to buy him some biscuits. The blogging account of the "Writers' March" raises the question of whether blogging can be considered as thoughtfulness or in other words as an act of reconsideration of our temporal and spatial existence. The following section links the idea of thoughtfulness with the discussion-probers through the lens of Brown's theoretical framework.

3.4 Blogging as Thoughtfulness?

Throughout the analysis in the previous sections I have linked the notion of action with blogging, and subsequently analyzed blogging as a relation to the self and to the others embodied by the rallies, whose virtual coverage constitutes the core in my content analysis. Moreover, I inspected the political and social dimensions of action, which complicate the response to the initial question(s) of this chapter: does blogging represents the public sphere or/and does it generate alternative blogging sphere? The analysis shows that blogging definitely acquired characteristics of the public sphere not as process *as such* but the potency it offered to users to forge relations and channel their

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[110] Carolyn, Miller, and Dawn, Shepherd

frustrations with the political order. In other words, blogging mobilized anti-Putin sentiments and organized it in a non-traditional way. The need for such organization signifies the desire for contextual change, but as Arendt noted, a public sphere must survive the "memorable deeds" of citizens, which at this point in time is really hard to give a monolectic answer. Nevertheless, the fact that it exists now and fosters action shows that besttoday.ru website can be treated as a public sphere for *now*. Furthermore, taking into consideration Brown's insights on thoughtfulness and juxtaposing them with most frequently used sentences appearing on the discussion probers, the answer to the above question(s) will become even more lucid.

As we saw in the previous chapter Brown concludes that abidance to laws – with the example of Socrates - embody thoughtfulness, as they offer a standard against which individual behavior is measured. In the march organized by writers law becomes very important as it embodies the desire of those who allegedly "don't matter" to be finally considered by the political configuration. The appeal to the Article 31 of the Russian constitution demonstrates that those who took part in the rallies – including bloggers – demanded the ruling-power to abide by the laws. The demand for abidance to the law is ubiquitous in the articulations of both the protestors and the bloggers. Boris Akynin suggested such march to take place on 13th of May – after the violent eruptions of the March of the Million and various ad hoc subsequent gatherings. The title that described the "controlled walk" on the website was *Moskva Progulialas*, which roughly translates to: Moscow took a walk; and was followed by opinion pieces claiming that Moscow is definitely not Putin-friendly. There are two important elements that highlight the emergence (and significance) of thoughtfulness – the fact that the people claimed their freedom of movement and gathering and the virtual articulations-actions that ensued.

The demands expressed on this "walk" constitute a "disruption" which – in Brown's account of genealogy of political values – disorders "coherent identities, both individual and collective."[111] But above all in expresses the need to establish an urgency for creating a free space where we (in my case the bloggers and the protesters) can rethink our political predicament and re-articulate the need for a space for such re-thinking. Blogging becomes important because it offers a dual articulation-action – that with the self and with the others – and in conjunction with the demonstrations it buttresses the Russian urgency for a free space "that enables the interrogation of political and historical premises."[112] This dual articulation is entailed in every discussion-prober section of the website since every topic is captured in the sentence "bloggers discuss," which cements both the process of articulation and the identity of a blogger. Indisputably, the posts that were published – not only in this instance but in others as well – might be succinct and not necessarily "rational;" however, such articulations-actions are the concomitant consequences of a public sphere where the social and the political coexist as different perspectives. That's precisely the reason why Mouffe's discontent with Habermas communicative rationality and her elaboration on the political is extremely contemporary and insightful, as she does not exclude emotions and passions, which are prevalent in the social realm.

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[111] *Politics Out of History*, 102
[112] Ibid, 119

CONCLUSION

The omnipresence of the multimedia material and the linguistic linkages analyzed in chapter three, clearly point out to the existence of multiple perspectives that demand to be with others. The organization of these perspectives is permeated with humor, anti- Putin sentiment, and emotional expressions that constitute meaning as long as they are situated in the context of the Russian order. The initial questions of this research where whether blogosphere constitutes a public sphere or alternative public spheres. In my analysis of besttoday.ru there are definitely characteristics of public sphere in the Arendtian understanding of freedom of movement and perspectives. However, after unraveling the social as a perspective as well, albeit of socialization, the question is harder to answer. The most important point of my research is to disentangle the direct application of some theories – such as in the case of Habermas – and reclaim human spontaneity and political though fullness. My task was to show an alternative way of thinking of public sphere and re-discovering *the political*.

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