Obstacles to Creative Citizenship

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Abstract
The Creative Citizens project asks whether new media enhance new forms and scale of creative civic activities. If so, the project seeks to identify practices that will exploit this new individual and collective activity, presumably as a means of achieving authentic self-governance. This paper considers three potential obstacles to the realization of a creative citizenship: that the sort of political engagement it fosters may be too personal and episodic; that the commonsensical political knowledge typical of politics known at a distance as performance and simulation may impose further limits on effective understanding and engagement; and that the emerging new media environment may be different enough that today’s digital skills and relationships may be insufficient in the medium term. The paper looks at the same conditions that inspire the creative citizenship project and reaches reverse conclusions – but not on the grounds of nostalgia or pessimism.

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Background and hypotheses

It is a given that political systems have as a basic task the ‘production of citizens’, which is usually said to occur through the life-long process of political socialization. In the legalistic sense of the term, one holds citizenship in a formal political entity. The most important, and the one most likely implied in abstract discussions of citizenship, is of course the nation-state. Some states grant automatic citizenship to people born of their citizens (*jus sanguinis*, or ‘right of blood’). Others recognize the citizenship of a person who happens to be born within the borders of that state (*jus soli*, or ‘right of soil’). Nearly all states allow for people to voluntarily attain citizenship – becoming ‘naturalized’ – through means like length of residence, command of the state’s language and demonstration of required knowledge of the state’s history, government and other identifying features. In addition, a principal purpose of public education is to prepare children for the responsibilities of adult citizenship. As adults, people experience citizenship through official activities like voting, paying taxes and exercising a variety of rights. But adult citizenship also entails emotional experience that pertains to expression (displaying the national flag), subjectivity (a self-defining sense of membership), collective behavior (volunteering in an election campaign), pleasure (independence day fireworks) and so on. Much of these unofficial, sometimes informal dimensions of citizenship constitute the realm of patriotism.

Even according to its own terms, this notion of political citizenship is in crisis. People decline to participate in the expected obligations and rituals like voting, volunteering for civic organizations or enlisting in military service. When they do participate, they do so half-heartedly; the classic example is casting a ballot without substantial knowledge of the candidate’s policy positions. Or, a sense of alienation from a political order that is perceived to work against their interests may lead citizens to engage with ‘populist’ parties at the margins of the system or otherwise choose alternative, even apolitical means of participation. People feel conflicting allegiances to sometimes competing levels of governance. They may view themselves, say, as more a cosmopolitan citizen of the supra-national European Union than of their home country. Or, conversely, as deeply rooted members or a region or community where everyday life seems to have only occasional connection to the distant, officious nation-state. There is endless, often very intense debate about how best to nurture citizenship through public school teaching. And then there is the persistent question of how to address and even what to call (‘illegal aliens’, ‘undocumented immigrants’) the global migration flows of usually Third World people seeking better lives, mostly in First World countries, by circumventing the laws of immigration and citizenship. Finally, this crisis in political citizenship plays out against the widely held sense of what in polite terms is called a ‘democratic deficit’, or a near-legitimation crisis of governmental institutions generally (Norris 2011).
These and other conditions have encouraged the search for a conception of citizenship that is not fundamentally political, that is, based on citizens' rights and obligations. The aim instead is to explore the lived experience of being a citizen, to discover and promulgate new (more effective and rewarding) ways of inhabiting democratic citizenship and perhaps to influence a shift away from rigid, legalistic interpretations of citizenship in favor of associational ones. Creative citizenship and cultural citizenship are the alternatives at hand, although their exact definitions are illusive.

Regarding cultural citizenship, Caroline Andrew (2005) and her colleagues are mainly concerned with fostering particular kinds of cultural policy on the part of national government. Miller (2011), in contrast, wishes to show how non-rational, affective experience defines citizenship for many people today. Creative citizenship seems to combine aspects of both. The Media, Community and the Creative Citizen project research plan (2012) locates citizenship in everyday creative activity, which for the project means using new media as civic space where citizens produce hyperlocal news and form virtual networks and opening opportunities for grassroots contributions to the design of local physical space. The definition of the key word creative is somewhat circular: “any act which involves the creative powers” (Media, Community and the Creative Citizen 2012: 2). But clearly the emphasis is first on new media, second on the local and third on expanding the notion of the political to include “artistic or cultural expression to innovative ways of collaborating” (Media, Community and the Creative Citizen 2012: 2). Together, these notions constitute a lived form of citizenship that neither challenges nor supplants the more traditional political one, but elaborates or realizes it in terms that may be more democratically effective or more emotionally rewarding. Creative citizenship says nothing about jus sanguinis or jus soli. It does not address immigration or divided allegiances, though its starting point is related to common dissatisfactions with the unresponsiveness of official governmental institutions.

The various experiments of the creative citizens project assume that people will want and be able to produce and distribute local news of political relevance, to form and reform online groups with political aspirations and to contribute to planning and design programs that pertain to their neighborhoods - and to sustain them over time, presumably with more than just a hope of being politically effective. While sympathetic to the project, this paper explores three working hypotheses that bear on these assumptions. If true, they will constrain the success of converting political citizenship into a creative one that re-energizes democratic engagement in everyday life.

1. Cultural citizenship
In the West today, citizenship is experienced mainly in cultural terms (Miller 2011). Mainstream politics is a profoundly media-dependent enterprise, executed like marketing and entertainment. Its representations and simulations foster a political imaginary
suffused with fantasy and para-social identifications. Citizenship is akin to fandom (van Zoonen 2004). This involves considerable creativity, both on the part of performative politicians and citizens’ imaginations. And this thoroughly normalized situation sets the terms as well for the practice of alternative politics. While creative, this sort of cultural citizenship raises basic questions about its potential political efficacy, the at-best episodic political engagement it may encourage and the extent to which it is more a structure of feeling than overt action.

2. Local knowledge

What citizens know under such conditions is a variety of local knowledge, in Geertz’s (1992) sense of circumstantiality or boundedness (as against universal rationality, timeless facts or, as he called it, “disincarnate knowing”). Such knowledge is less hyperlocal news and more popular culture, more illegitimate or unofficial than formally sanctioned. Bodies of knowledge about astrology, celebrity life, ‘fake news’ (theonion.com; Baumgartner & Morris 2006) – including and perhaps especially regarding political figures – are systematic, explanatory, often prized and even available in respectable media. Local knowledge offers an oblique orientation to politics and may even draw on the collective wisdom of crowd sourcing. It is not, however, the knowledge examined by tests required for gaining legal citizenship. Nor is it taught in civics class. Again, there is much creativity at work here in production, circulation, consumption and remediation. Local knowledge directly informs the political imaginary described above. If this is the body of knowledge common to creative citizenship, what sort of basis for what kind of political action does it offer? Perhaps under the political-cultural conditions above it is necessary, but is it sufficient? Or is present-day local (political) knowledge equivalent to earlier invented traditions and textbook myths?

3. New media domestication

The emergence of creative citizenship depends on the communicative possibilities afforded by new media. This simple statement implies the functioning of a wide range of often invisible, barely considered, little understood and frequently changing technology. New media affordances are both built-in and ‘domesticated’ by users. While it is undeniable that hackers can and do reconfigure new media for purposes of their own, by and large, the design process is top-down. New media designers build increasingly intuitive machines, but even then most users never discover their device’s maximum potential, let alone truly customize them. Most of what passes for personalization is cosmetic, like wallpaper and ringtones. To what extent is domestication today actually possible, and with what consequences? What is the nature of emerging new media, and how might their nature obstruct or enhance the realization of creative citizens?

Political culture
Any discussion of the experience of citizenship must locate it in political culture. Decades ago, Harold Lasswell (1936) said that for a practitioner exercising power, politics is about ‘who gets what, when, how’. So, while understanding of institutions may be essential for a complete political analysis, Lasswell (1936: vi) stressed that it is the ‘living forms’ of politics that are most revealing. One such is what he termed ‘symbols’. “(A)ny well-knit way of life molds human behavior into its own design,” Lasswell (1936: 30) observed, partly through “song and story from the very beginning of consciousness.” Lasswell identified “gossip, fiction [and] motion pictures” (Lasswell 1936: 31) as modern political influences, adding that the “emblems and words of the organized community are also part of the precious haze of early experience” (Lasswell 1936: 34), and went on to detail examples, including cartoons, “the picture language of the public” (Lasswell 1936: 35). Crucially, a “well-established ideology perpetuates itself with little planned propaganda” (Lasswell 1936: 29). These ideas are familiar today. And they are the essential feature of political culture, the imaginative domain that provides the expressive means for the popular knowing of an otherwise formal, distant, even abstract political system.

Citizenship is experienced then largely in terms of political culture, mainly as a psycho-social-semiotic phenomenon. This reality, however, is implicitly denied by what might be called the prescriptive, official definition of political citizenship. It is articulated in civics textbooks and campaigns for so-called civics literacy and especially in the range and kind of knowledge that is measured in naturalization tests. The US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), for example, provides 100 ‘civics questions’ to help prepare for the examination2. A sample question from the category American Government asks, What are the two rights in the Declaration of Independence? Under American History, What territory did the US buy from France in 1803? Under Integrated Civics, Why does the flag have 13 stripes? The correct answers are considered factual ones with no room for interpretation. One’s response is right or wrong. Similarly, the private Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) conducts studies of university students and adults to measure their “knowledge of American history and institutions” (www.americancivicliteracy.org). They find the majority “failed the exam.” Questions include: The power of judicial review was established in [what document or court case]? What part of the government has the power to declare war? The ISI claims that factual ignorance of US history and government leads to ‘semi-literate, passive voting’.

Whatever the behavioral implications of such knowledge for civic participation or the quality of democratic governance, it is indisputable that this conception of political citizenship is a highly rational one, rooted in a reasoning process that engages the certainty of historical information and the utility of knowing institutional formalities. For

2 www.uscis.gov/citizenship/teachers/educational-products/100-civics-questions-and-answers-mp3-audio-english-version
the immigrant, responsible citizenship begins here; to be a politically active adult requires it.

Most evidence shows that political citizenship is at best an ideal, and maybe unrealizable. Reviewing a half-century of research, Michael Delli Carpini (2005) concluded that, “the ‘average’ citizen is woefully uninformed about political institutions and processes, substantive policies and socioeconomic conditions and important political actors such as elected officials and political parties” (2005: 28) in the United States. When asked about foreign affairs, national legislatures and geographic places, Americans generally scored less well than did citizens of other countries (Delli Carpini 2005: 32). Delli Carpini says in this 2005 study that Americans’ level of political ignorance has been fairly stable during the last fifty years. But in an earlier article, comparing a 1989 national survey of American adults with similar studies in the 1940s and 1950s, Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter (1991) judged that “individuals emerge from the educational system [today] with a lower level of knowledge about current political figures and alignments. . . And individuals of all ages are less able to answer questions about current politics than their counterparts with similar educational backgrounds in the past” (1991: 607). They agree with other researchers that an overall “declining interest in politics” works against whatever civic knowledge schools attempt to instill.

The desire to foster a creative citizenship is directly related to the view that while political citizenship may be officially prescribed, it has yet to be achieved – and with its narrow sense of facts and the expectation that people are predominantly politically rational actors, it will rarely be realized and then perhaps only among a powerful elite. Not only that: given the nature of political culture - Dan Nimmo and James Combs (1990) write sympathetically that, “Fantasy is one of the chief ways that the mediation of political realities occurs” (1990: 7) – a creative citizen may actually be more democratically functional than a political citizen.

**Three obstacles**

1. **A cultural citizenship**

Most people have little or no direct contact with politicians or political institutions, apart from interactions with bureaucrats who provide necessary state services – a building permit, a passport, a driver’s license. Political action beyond the most local, which almost by definition fails to gain media attention, takes place mostly at a distance, quite literally in far-away locations like national capitol but also in the sense of the exotic and rarely encountered. But of course it does capture media attention. And becomes oddly familiar. In so far as people attend to politics, it is likely to happen here, through representations. Or rather, through simulacra as Baudrillard (1995) means it: a political performance tailored specifically to media needs, almost a charade, a representation of an event that never really happened, at least as it appears to have happened. An innocuous example is
when members of the US Congress make speeches on the floor of the House of Representatives or Senate to a chamber empty of their colleagues. The purpose is to be recorded by C-SPAN’s cameras, which do not reveal the lack of an audience, whose images can be used by the politicians as evidence of their oratorical skill on behalf of their constituents (Frantzich and Sullivan 1996; Packer 2010). It goes without saying that successful politicians today have media advisors who influence everything from grooming to speech patterns and gesticulations to the design of what Daniel Boorstin (1961) more than a half-century ago called pseudo-events. In this way, as Dick Pels (2003) puts it in a discussion of political style, a politician comes to personally embody the political system from the perspective of constituents. The citizen appreciates the “stylish conduct that ‘rarefies’ the politician” and turns the politician into a ‘media friend’ . . . with whom political audiences cultivate a relationship of parasocial intimacy-at-a-distance” (2003: 51). This formulation is further complicated by celebrities who become political figures, leveraging their Hollywood or sports brand to get elected or advance a cause, which itself has likely been selected, recursively, to market the star’s commercial appeal. All of which is covered by mainstream and tabloid news media alike.

This way of knowing politics – culturally, aesthetically, imaginatively – may lead to ways of engaging politically that have similar qualities. This is recognized by Robert Putnam’s famous lament that Americans are “(n)o longer participants, we are becoming mere observers of our collective destiny . . .” (Saguaro 2001: 3). Putnam’s work claims to document a generational shift, in which the direct participation in civic activities that typified people who came of age during the Great Depression and World War II and lived their adulthood in the prosperous and secure post-war period steadily declines with their deaths. It is not insignificant that the mediatization of politics coincided with their later years (Strömback 2008). For succeeding generations, beginning with the Baby Boomers, the experience of politics took on an altogether different character. This new orientation is recognized by the psychologist Drew Westen (2007: 36), who asserts that now it is not so much the marketplace of ideas but the marketplace of emotions “that matters most in American politics.” George Marcus (2002) and his colleagues (Neuman et al. 2007) ground this observation by describing the sentimental citizen for whom emotion is as important as reason, critical in fact to the appropriate activation of thinking and acting. It was just this sort of phenomenological transformation that Raymond Williams (1975) identified when he wrote that a “new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come ‘from’ anywhere . . . [It] responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities . . . yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling” (1975: 48; emphasis added).

3 The use of predictive analytics, or computer modeling of large databases to identify the likely behavior of individual voters, is now in the US a feature not only of presidential campaigns but local ones as well. Such knowledge allows highly personalized targeting of political messages (Fung 2014).
Among the implications of this new political sensibility is the sort of political involvement that it will foster. It is likely to be intermittent, personal and indirect. Because politics near and far is increasingly known through the media, a citizen’s attention to issues will not only be guided by the media’s agenda-setting function but by awareness that is itself directed by media consumption patterns. These in turn may be the result of felt passions that taken together are more kaleidoscopic, even accidental, than orderly: animal rights, climate change, bicycling in car traffic, say. There may be an impulsiveness that results from media depictions and personal experience, an engagement that comes and goes.

This personal dimension, most evident in blogging, is another logical form of political participation. Putting aside the question of narcissistic naïveté, engagement that proceeds from strongly felt emotion is likely to be personal above all else. At its best, this means the capacity to define one’s individual problems as public issues shared with others to be solved collectively. Alternatively, the reverse might be true: abstract, global matters, barely understood in their complexity, but recast into the terms of one’s life whether accurately or not. An example might be viewing a news report of distant storm damage that ignites fearful memories that in turn lead to collecting used clothing to aid the familiar yet unknown survivors.

Charitable contributions (tax deductable) of this sort are popular and easy, while membership in lobbying organizations (AARP, formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) or INGOs (Human Rights Watch, World Wildlife Fund) has skyrocketed in recent years, especially in high- and middle-income countries (SustainAbility 2003: 8). Putnam (1996) adds to this list “political contributions, civil litigation, talk radio. . .” (He also refers to membership in mailing-list organizations.) As a form of political participation, these are indirect. Without leaving home, a citizen can send money over the phone or online. A tee shirt or bumper sticker displays the person’s activist allegiance, socially.

2. Local knowledge

If the play of politics is available mostly as a distant performance, even a simulation of some textbook ideal, which at the same time includes elements that seem unexpectedly to address the individual citizen in personal terms, and yet remains all the while barely influence-able, with a media-life of its own – then the political knowledge of most people is unlikely to include much of the kind required in citizenship exams or sought after in civics literacy campaigns.

Instead, it is apt to be local knowledge, a variety of common sense. What local knowledge is not, in Jerome Bruner’s terms (1986: 11-13), is the logico-scientific mode of thinking.
That is formal, systematic with evidence and reasoning, tentative, testable and abstract. Local knowledge is closer to what Bruner calls the narrative mode. That is rooted in “good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily ‘true’) historical accounts” (1986: 13) There, people engage in “everyday reasoning,” being “the most reasonable they can be . . .” (Smorti 2008: 227). Local knowledge is also labeled popular knowledge (Birchall 2006) and counterknowledge (Thompson 2008). These “unofficial” and even “illegitimate” bodies of knowledge offer outsider explanations, including conspiracy theories and “voodoo histories” (Aaronovitch, 2009). They include, as John Fiske (1993: 188) observes, the paranormal, numerology and superstitions, each of which has a distinctive way of knowing. Claire Birchall (2006) adds alien abduction narratives, urban legends, new age practices and gossip.

Common sense, the umbrella concept that shelters the various bodies of local knowledge, is not a dumb mirroring of the world, but a somewhat consistent way of sense-making. Clifford Geertz (2000: 75-76) characterizes it as “down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom, judgments or assessments.” Geertz says that while common sense makes the implicit claim of presenting “reality neat,” it is more: an “interpretation of the immediacies of experience.” He identifies five aspects to this vernacular reasoning (Geertz 2000: 85-92):

- Common sense possesses naturalness; things are as they are.
- Practicalness is second, as in being sensible.
- The third quality is what Geertz calls thinness, or literalness; a common sense report of the world is ‘graphically exact’.
- Fourth is immethodicalness, recognition that the world is an inconsistent place.
- Lastly, common sense is characterized by accessibleness; anyone can have it.

The experience of citizenship imbued with a commonsensical orientation to politics as conceived above would at once take representations of politics as they are and be convinced they are not what they seem: that there is a backstage out of view. Anyone can observe this double-sidedness. And yet the commonsensical orientation would probably lack the analytical insight or substantive information to reveal a great deal more. Add to this the related tabloid view of celebrities, politicians included. They are like regular people, only more so. So much more so that their very existence is entertaining, even intended to be entertaining, but also a moral lesson about the superiority of being regular (Lowenthal 1944, Bird 1992). Entertaining political celebrities do what they do, predictably. And to a point, giving them attention is rewarding. But everyone knows more is going on. In daily life, a regular person keeps an eye on things so as not to be taken advantage of. People do not need arcane knowledge to adopt that attitude toward politics – it is simply common sense.

If this formulation is accurate, then there are severe limits to the political efficaciousness of creative citizenship. Lack of factual knowledge, suspiciousness of rigorous systems of reasoning, the feeling that the political system is ultimately knowable in roughly the
same terms as everyday life will act as a brake on productive political participation (see Mason 2002).

3. New media affordances
At the heart of the Creative Citizens Research Plan is “the emergence of new forms of media and personal communication in the Web 2.0 environment, usually called ‘social networks’” (2012: 1). The projects that developed from this observation cover a range of activity, including digital media literacy and story-telling techniques, digital mapping and games applied to grass-roots participation in policy planning, activism, blogging and even near field communication (NFC) scanning of fabric art (Creative Citizens: The Conference Program 2014). The centrality of new media to a vision of a creative economy for the UK is also stated in the Nesta report that is one of the keystone documents for Creative Citizens. Its chapter on ‘creative technologies and markets’ concludes by observing that, “The momentum of the technological trajectories that are shaping the convoluted – even chaotic – landscape . . . is unlikely to abate in the years ahead. If anything, it is likely to accelerate” (Bakhshi, Hargreaves and Mateos-Garcia 2013: 42).

Despite the near-equivalence between a vision of creative citizenship and digital technologies, there is little sustained analysis of technology per se. Rather, digital technology seems mostly to be considered an instrument to be put to use in the sorts of projects mentioned above. Several unaddressed questions, at different levels of analysis, immediately come to mind: To what extent will today’s digital technology persist into the future, and how might it change? Is it reasonable to expect that users can significantly participate in the co-design (‘domestication’) of emerging new media, or will the range of possible uses and the practices of usage be largely built-in, becoming an example of weak technological determinism? If so, who will decide the design, and according to what criteria? Should a view of new media focus on individual devices or take a more systemic perspective? What are the limits to new media’s potential contributions to creative citizenship? Is the stress on new media a potential problem in the conception and realization of creative citizenship?

To illustrate how aspects of digital media technology might present a challenge, if not an obstacle, to a creative citizenship, take the question regarding devices and systems of new media (this discussion draws on Miller 2014a, in press, 2014c). One sense of emerging media is that they are becoming less discrete objects providing dedicated services and more functionalities (audio, video, text) that are dispersed in built environments. The internet of things is an increasingly common way of expressing this notion, but so too are smart (and conscious) homes, intelligent environments and wearables. A world of media functionalities embedded in non-media objects, surfaces and structures implies near-continuous interfaces that can be accessed through natural means like speech and gesture, or even automatically. Digitally enhanced environments will gain the capacity not only
to respond, but to learn and anticipate people’s behavior. Engaging with media will be
experienced as augmentation, not mere use. Just what constitutes a medium will be open
to question.

This speculation is not idle; numerous researchers and corporations agree on its
likelihood. And there are physical sites where a version of this pattern of development
can be charted historically. The automobile is one. Expensive, unreliable, big AM radios
were added awkwardly to cars in the early twenties. During the post-war period, cars
steadily became a place where a variety of media were integrated into their design, and
unexpectedly the car became a treasured opportunity for media consumption. These days,
the automobile has become thoroughly digitalized, with micro-computers governing the
car’s operation, supplementing the driver, altering performance and exchanging various
kinds of information with networks. Digital technology has even supplanted the human
driver in experiments in autonomous cars.

The experience of media in today’s automobiles is mixed: much goes on outside the
occupants’ knowing. In other ways, people touch screens, connect their smartphones,
key-in information – taking active, conscious steps to engage with their car’s media. Few
would doubt that digital media are now inextricably a part of the definition of the
automobile. Which is hardly an obvious historical outcome, since the horseless carriage
was intended to be above all else a transportation vehicle.

The automobile industry conducts considerable research on the design of cars’ new media
interfaces (remembering that ‘media’ here means infotainment but also digital
infrastructure). The Volkswagen Group of American Electronics Research Laboratory
(vwerl.com) in Silicon Valley collaborates with the MIT Media Lab, for example. Much
about an interface is relational. Its design is meant to signal what the medium can do and
provide the means to use it. User Experience (UX) interface design stresses ease and
naturalness and may even have an intentional emotional component, making the medium
seem to be empathetic or at least not intimidating. This thinking can be seen in
automobile interface design that substitutes speech commands and responses or finger
swipes for turning knobs or pushing keys. Since the driver’s attention is principally on
the task of driving, these considerations are more than aesthetic.

What might this view of media technology’s near-term future suggest for the realization
of creative citizens? A mediatized world of natural, continuous interfaces might, on the
one hand, make media literacy unnecessary. The ubiquity of media functionalities would
give them the feel of electricity, hardly something that requires much attention or special
effort (Pew 2014). Big-data bases and intelligent environments might be capable of
remarkable personalization, including anticipating desires and mood setting according to
an individual’s preferences. These qualities invoke Marshall McLuhan’s remark that fish
would be the last to discover water.
Such a future could make distant politics more intimate, inviting an easy democratic collaboration. Or the simulations and parasocial intimacies of today’s politics might grow by orders of magnitude, creating a sort of digital false consciousness, or at least an alternative world (‘second life’) with little direct connection to the actual play of political power. In this way, creativity could be invited, pleasing and relatively effortless, but without serious political consequences.

Creativity in digital media terms of the kind advanced by the Creative Citizen projects may also have an historically brief value, perhaps relevant mostly to a technologically intermediate period of portable devices (‘Web 2.0’), between the first major era of digitalization and whatever comes next, possibly something more decentralized, embedded and natural-seeming. In fact, there is a feeling of the past to blogging and grassroots urban planning, for instance, not the future. So-called citizen journalists are not unlike the partisan activist writers of earlier times (Carey 1982). The New Journalism revolt against mainstream objectivity took place in the sixties and seventies (Wolfe 1973). Top-down urban planning and renewal were long ago criticized for their elitist nature (Jacobs 1961). With creativity so broadly and elusively defined, with this sense of déjà vu and with a quite different digital world on the horizon, these projects may be less politically empowering than they seem.

Conclusion

The notion of the creative citizen grows directly from John Hartley’s ruminations about a silly citizenship. Hartley recognizes the "stage for citizenship is literally that. It is as much dramatic and performative as it is deliberative. The play’s the thing, as DIY-citizens . . . perform their own identities and relations" (2010: 241). Hartley both describes present conditions and offers an alternative to the classic and perhaps failed political citizenship. This paper joins in that project, offering three sets of speculative constraints on its achievement. Awareness of these potential obstacles should help refine the conceptualization of creative citizenship, making the actions that proceed from it more successful.

References


Media, Community and the Creative Citizen Research Plan – Phase 1 (June to December
2012) available at: http://creativecitizens.co.uk/research-overview/


