

9/11 and his own family's losses that day when his cousin, electrician Joseph DiPilato, was killed. The final chapter addresses Ground Zero face on. Mosco writes about downtown New York and the destruction of the Twin Towers in light of his own upbringing a few streets away in Little Italy. He recalls walks from his tenement block in Mulberry Street to the harbour, through blue-collar manufacturing areas that were removed in the 1960s period of deindustrialization, to be replaced by the World Trade Center. This enormous spectacle was tribute to the postindustrial service economy, to the new New York of the late 20th century (and a premier instance of the technological sublime, on all scheduled trips of New York harbour tourists would gaze in wonder at the sheer scale and magnificence of the glass towers). As Mosco observes, the terrorist assault of 9/11 brutally announced 'the end of the end of history' – a horrendous real-world event puncturing yet another myth.

The Digital Sublime will appeal to students as well as researchers, and I could see it as a helpful text for advanced undergraduates and research students. The writing is sophisticated, but lucid and unpretentious. It touches on many of the key issues of contemporary social change deftly and with a level of knowledge that is too often lacking in communications studies that are trapped in mediocentrism and fail to show evidence of having read widely or deeply.

On the downside I would mention the peculiarly American habit of extensive reference to popular movies to make arguments. Recourse to the likes of *The Graduate* and *The Matrix* is revealing of the permeation of American cinema through even academic culture in America, but is often elusive to European readers (who maybe should get out more, but would probably go see Arthur Miller's plays rather than a Tom Cruise film). More seriously, the absence of serious engagement with Manuel Castells is a weakness. Mosco refers in his acknowledgements to the 'extraordinary contribution of Manuel Castells', yet *The Digital Sublime* allows not a mention of *The Information Age* trilogy.

References

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Víctor F. Sampedro Blanco (ed.), *13-M, Multitudes On-Line*. Madrid: Catarata, 2005. €18. 317 pp.

The demonstrations in Spain on 13 March 2004, which took place after the terrorist attacks in Madrid, presented an interesting challenge for social science research. For the first time in Spain's history, people employed communication technologies in order to create the dynamics of peaceful civil disobedience. The events generated a debate as to the intensity with which citizens are willing to take part in the political

process through non-conventional mechanisms of participation; this took place especially in a political climate in which the expansion of disaffection has been deep enough to increase the preoccupation not only of scholars but also of politicians.

Even though citizens felt distant from the political process and unrepresented by politicians, or suffered from political inefficacy, under these circumstances their disaffection vanished; they were concerned about an extremely painful sociopolitical situation, and stepped out to mobilize themselves on the day before a general election. In that way, they put into practice the concept of accountability at a moment when they considered that politicians were not representing them anymore, and that the government was deliberately hiding the truth.

This edited volume, under the academic coordination of Dr Víctor Sampedro, is published in this particularly extraordinary context, dealing with events that had never happened before in Spanish political memory, and to this day have only occurred in the Philippines and Venezuela. With the collaboration of researchers affiliated to the universities of Madrid and members of various social groups, Sampedro has edited a work about these incidents and their consequences. The publication of this fascinating book is accompanied by a DVD that complements the main thesis of the volume.

The book is in response to those who have interpreted what happened in Spain between 11 and 14 March via some form or other of conspiracy theory. The authors conducted their research strategy within the well-known 'spiral of silence' theoretical framework, formulated by Noelle-Neumann. Their argument states that, even though the circumstances and conditions for the initiation of a spiral of silence were present, the spiral itself never took off. It is interesting to emphasize that their conclusions are generally based on strong and meticulous methodology inclined to a qualitative perspective, including participant observation and focus groups involving active participants in the demonstrations. The use of this methodology made it possible to offer valuable empirical verification of the analysis.

The analysis introduces the reader to the new concepts of techno-politics and 'the masses'. The increasing use of new information and communication technologies has changed the very essence of social mobilization.

On 13 March 2004 activists provided a good example of this dynamic. With the use of video cameras, cell phones and the Internet, they kept in touch constantly, in a loose social web. Connecting regularly with foreign mass media for accurate information, citizens were organized without any central coordination, without a previous strategy, without a prior scheme. Consequently, as argued by the authors, conventional coordinates for the analysis of social movements are not enough today. Traditionally, the success of these movements would be measured by the number of participants and their political and media impact. This has now been modified by the development of new information and communication technologies, and their direct use in this field.

The development of new technologies offers civil society the tools to transfer the *watchdog* function to citizens. This task has traditionally been performed by the media, but in certain situations of institutional obstruction they are incapable of fulfilling that role satisfactorily. These new communicational processes are not under the control of the state, the political parties or the democratic institutions. These are mechanisms that belong exclusively to the citizens, who are thus able to demand responsibility from politicians directly. These developments show that new

technologies are not necessarily elements of suspicion or distrust, as suggested by some pessimistic scholars. On the contrary, sometimes they can provide the means to facilitate a real intensification and extension of democratic principles and civic commitment.

In some chapters of this book, it is easy to identify the bias introduced by the explicit political activism of the researchers. The detection of this preconception is the only slight criticism that can be made about this book. Nonetheless, this was not unexpected, seeing that most contributors to this book are both scholars and active participants in these demonstrations. However, awareness of this possible academic flaw gives the book credibility – that their depiction of the facts is near to what really happened.

This book has had a considerable impact in Spanish academic circles. Sampedro satisfactorily illustrates the multifaceted and complex reality of these important and new sociopolitical processes that frame the Spanish demonstrations that took place on 13 March 2004. The key findings make a significant contribution both to media studies and to the study of democracy in general, and specifically to this more recent field of study, new social movements. It is a research work on political communication that accumulates valuable empirical evidence of a theory frequently handled: processes of mass communication determine the course of political life.

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Michael Dawson, *The Consumer Trap: Big Business Marketing in American Life*. Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003. US\$26.95 (hbk), US\$17.95 (pbk). 203 pp.

Criticism of rampant consumerism has become a growth industry in recent years in the US: such authors as Juliet Schor, Robert Frank, Kalle Lasn, Alissa Quart and Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin come to mind, as do the PBS programme *Affluenza* and a host of publications championing a return to 'voluntary simplicity'. Many critiques place the responsibility squarely on the consumers themselves; however seductive advertisements and the lifestyles of television 'reference groups' may be, the ultimate problem is that individuals do not exercise restraint. Others, recognizing that economic actions that are rational for individuals can often lead to socially irrational results, call for an expansion in government regulation. Still others focus their guns chiefly on advertising, seeing it as a tool for engendering popular consent and enforcing social control.

While pointing to all of the same negative effects as other critics – including environmental degradation, undemocratic and potential unsustainable polities, and degradation of personal life – Michael Dawson insists that consumerism is largely a result of big business marketing, which in turn needs to be understood more broadly as a manifestation of class struggle. For Dawson, marketing, which includes but goes far beyond advertising, is a tool by which big business elites coerce the masses. 'In ancient Rome, demagogues and patricians used centurions