



Jakub Nowak, *Pirating the Popular*. Popular Culture and World Politics Conference, Stockholm University, Sweden, September 13–14th 2013

Department of Media Studies of Stockholm University organized and hosted the sixth Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP) Conference in September 2013. The PCWP conferences are annual interdisciplinary meetings of scholars focusing on various theoretical and empirical studies on intersections of spheres of world politics and popular culture in many perspectives ranging from social sciences, through humanities, to the arts. 2013's conference main topic was dubbed *Pirating the Popular*: the organizers welcomed proposals for papers, performances and screenings addressing many different aspects of world politics and popular culture that are evoked by the influential metaphor of piracy – understood not only as the practice of unauthorized usage of copyrighted material, but also in broader sense of term, which connotes popular (sometimes counter-cultural) re-appropriation of mainstream policies supporting Intellectual Property Rights regimes. In the latter perspective piracy is a metaphor for various kinds of creative activities within the sphere of popular culture that negotiate official policies of culture industry and state/corporate agents.

Two lecturers as conference's keynote speakers were invited. The first was Siva Vaidyanathan, professor of University of Virginia, fellow of the New York Institute for the Humanities and the Institute for the Future of the Book, and a frequent contributor on media

and cultural issues in various US periodicals including “New York Times” and “The Nation”. His lecture – entitled *The Googlization of Europe: Privacy, Competition and the Future of Knowledge* – directly referred to his book *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)* [University of California Press 2011]. Vaidhyanathan presented comprehensive critical evaluation of Google’s global impact, including company’s policies on privacy, intellectual property, possibly socially dangerous impact of its search algorithms and others.

The second keynote speaker was Elisa Kreisinger, a video artist based in New York City, a speaker on many universities including MIT and Harvard, and a collaborator with notable culture industry agents (NBC, Paramount Pictures and more). Kreisinger is a prominent voice in the remix and online video community, she produces audiovisual remixes of various culture industry products, among her notable works are remixing *Mad Men* into feminists and *The Real Housewives* into lesbians. During her speech and audiovisual presentation (*Talking Back: Remixing Pop Culture*) she analyzed the potential of digital media as tool of semiotic challenge in hand of media audiences by referring to do-it-yourself counter-cultural ethos of today online video communities.

The conference programme was divided into several panels divided rather in thematic than discipline-based way. The *Mediated Cultures of Violence* panel focused on various aspects of popular mediatization of aggression, violence, and death. Chris Hendershot of York Centre for International and Security Studies in Canada presented the phenomenon of aestheticization of self defense by analyzing the growing media popularity of Colion Noir, an internet celebrity self-describing himself as “urban gun-enthusiast”. Nick Robison of the University of Leeds explored the issue of violence militarization in videogames, whereas Lori a Crowe (York University) interrogated the role of the comical in the neoliberal militarized superhero, asking if humor in the superhero movie detracts audiences from neoliberal militarized themes and thus sustains a particular mainstream ideological agenda.

Simon Philpott (Newcastle University) in the panel focusing on *Visual Representations* presented a visual analysis of Australian football’s sports diplomacy, in particular how Australian indigenous cultures are used by mainstream media to showcase Australian culture. The panel consisted of two more topics. The first, presented by Karin Becker and Andreas Widholm of Stockholm University, was analytical ethnographic exploration of public screens (public viewing areas) perceived as increasingly important sites of performance and politics, in which carnevalesque and mediatized behaviors interweave into the public’s performance and display. The second topic, presented by Marie Thorsten of Doshisha University in Japan, was examination of three twentieth-century Japanese artists whose works are examples of very critical voices in the popular discourse on Japanese modern history.

The second day of the conference was strictly devoted to presentations and discussions on how global discourses of piracy intervene with geopolitics on national and global levels. On the one hand, global and national policies were analyzed: Katarina Bivald and Maria Jansson (Stockholm University) presented various political, social, and economic factors shaping recent transformations in Swedish film policy that change how popular culture is produced and consumed in Sweden. Jonathan Kuyper analyzed how decisions made by World Trade Organization in 2013 concerning legal dispute between the United States and Antigua have led to modifications in global politics concerning international frameworks of Intellectual Property Rights. On the other hand, many papers focused on political and ideological aspects of a grassroots (bottom-up) level of social practices labeled as piracy. Presentation of

Miyase Christensen (Stockholm University) analytically framed the Arab Spring uprisings as mediatized meta-event during which several communicative spaces that opened up during the uprising allowed for a multiplicity of topics to re-enter public discourse across local, national and global scales. Jakub Nowak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Poland), after departing from the culture studies critical approach, analytically reviewed discourses on piracy and (national, transnational, corporate) power that have emerged as a result of the people's collective online anti-ACTA engagement. Other papers focused on i. a. popcultural symbolizations of Turkey and Atatürk, latest problems with a traditional concept of global cultural market, and politicians' self-styling online strategies.

Last but not least, a very interesting panel discussion was organized on the second day of the conference. During the roundtable on *Teaching Popular Culture and World Politics* Matt Davies, Kyle Grayson, Simon Philpott (all from Newcastle University), and David Mutimer (York University of Canada) along with many active members of the audience discussed various advantages and problems of teaching courses focusing on popcultural aspects of global politics.

The conference was a very successful scientific event, an important meeting of scholars focusing on various aspects of intersections of spheres of world politics and popular culture. Conference organizers succeeded in balancing a interdisciplinary character of the meeting with a relatively precisely set topic which made papers presented in Stockholm interesting to all (or almost all) of conference participants. All of these made the Stockholm's meeting a fruitful, rewarding experience for all of its participants.