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Larsen, Malene Charlotte; Ryberg, Thomas; Albrechtslund, Anders

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From Moral Panic to Political Decisiveness – Discourses and Rhetoric on Youth and Technology

Malene Charlotte Larsen, Thomas Ryberg, Anders Albrechtslund
Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University
malene@hum.aau.dk, Ryberg@hum.aau.dk, alb@hum.aau.dk

In this article we explore two media discourses related to youth and technology – one related to the social networking site “arto.dk” and the other with the apparent “national trend” of “Happy Slapping”. We analyse how the media discourses have been adopted within both the political and social world and how they have been transformed into concrete political and social action. In line with the critique of Critical Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001) we will argue that there may not be a direct link between written discourses as e.g. media texts and then actual social actions leading to or being an outcome of the media texts. Hence, we argue that it is necessary to take into consideration the actual, concrete social actions related to the written discourses. Further, we argue that it is necessary for researchers to enter and engage with the field of social actions as to instantiate a change of the practices. We take our analytical departure in Nexus Analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) as composed of three phases: engaging, navigating and changing the nexus of practice. We analyse the cycles of discourse surrounding youth and technology in a broader view from philosophy of technology, as we shall argue that the discourses are recurring phenomena, which have a long history related to the notion of “moral panics”. We argue that the discourses of technology and youth are closely connected with a view from a technological dystopian determinism and how this view becomes entangled with a political idea of micro-management. In relation to the notions of micro-management and technology we discuss problems related to an increased focus on it-surveillance and control by analysing the political actions emanating from the media coverage of the two media discourses.

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