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The Interactive Intellectual

Bas Heijne on Twitter*

Abstract – In this article the delicate balance between accessibility and complexity that public intellectuals face is addressed. Considering this balance, it is remarkable that some public intellectuals use a medium like Twitter, which can be very public but at the same time restricts its users to a maximum of 140 characters per message. How can this medium be useful to spread intellectual ideas? To investigate this, we look at the Twitter activity of the Dutch public intellectual Bas Heijne. Three distinct categories of Twitter usage are proposed and applied to analyze Heijne's use of Twitter: promotion, communicative interactivity and informative interactivity.

1 Introduction

The public intellectual has to deal with his ideas delicately: on the one hand he has to speak out, to make his ideas public in an accessible manner, to be heard. On the other hand, he cannot afford to popularize his ideas too much because that may not do justice to the complexity of the issues he is addressing. This contradiction stems from the concept of the public intellectual, described by Posner (2003: 35) as someone who 'expresses himself in a way that is accessible to the public [...] on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast'. According to his empirical study (2003: 167), a mutual negative correlation exists between intellectuality and publicity ('more public, less intellectual', and vice versa). This conclusion is based on the negative effect that academic employment (being more intellectual and possibly less understandable) has on the amount of media mentions. This is no surprise, considering that a less intellectual message is better understood by a larger audience and less people may understand a more intellectual, complex message. Still, many public intellectuals may be assumed to try and get their messages through to as many people as possible without compromising the complexity of a particular issue too much. Although there has been plenty of discussion on the public intellectual (Collini 2006, Etzioni 2006, Posner 2003, Melzer et al. 2003), the public has proven to be a more problematic notion in the sense that it is often not visible and hence hard to identify (Posner 2003). Who does the intellectual try to address and how does this affect the balance between complexity and accessibility?

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With this balance in mind, it is remarkable that some intellectuals use a medium such as Twitter. This online network is based on the concept of sms and similarly restricts its users to use at most 140 characters. The short messages called 'tweets' can be sent to selected people or all 'followers', the people who have subscribed to someone's account to receive that person's messages. People who are not subscribed can read any message on profiles that are public. The service can be used on any computer and mobile device with an internet connection. In this way, people can give each other instant updates about events such as breaking news, emergencies and gossip. Users can copy tweets of others to their own account to spread the original message, which is called 'retweeting'. With the ability to include shortened hyperlinks in order to fit in the small message, the messages can easily be illustrated with pictures or videos. This also provides the possibility to refer to background information about an event. In tweets, people can use a hashtag "#" as a label for their messages which functions as a keyword in search strings. The more people use the same hashtag, the more popular a particular topic is. With this hashtag users can indicate in few words what the topic of their tweet is, but they also appear to use it to point out whether their tweet is for instance meant as a #joke. The popularity of Twitter and its acceptance as a serious medium can best be demonstrated by its drawbacks. Several tweets have unintentionally resulted in scandals and negative exposure, when for instance public officials or artists disclose compromising or confidential information.¹ This indicates that the content of tweets is taken seriously in both traditional media and politics (Small 2011), despite the apparent informal character of the short messages.

As mentioned above, the content, the recipients, the topic, and possible background information in the form of a hyperlink or hashtag all have to be fitted within the maximum size of 140 characters. Papacharissi (2009) investigates how the design or architecture of social media influences the use of these media. The social network Facebook for instance has a more flexible design than LinkedIn, the social network intended for people in professional occupations, hence the former leaves more room for users to express themselves in different ways. In the case of Twitter, the maximum of 140 characters restricts the sender in the actual content. Consequently, using Twitter would be a complicating factor in the delicate balance between complexity and accessibility that the public intellectual has to deal with. The limited length of the tweets gives the impression that Twitter is only convenient for short and therefore shallow expressions. To investigate this perception of superficiality we will look at the use of Twitter by Bas Heijne, a Dutch public intellectual who uses Twitter among other media to communicate and express his ideas.²

1 See e.g. http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2075071_2075082_2075118,00.html (15 August 2013).

2 For a more extensive overview of Heijne's work, see Heynders 2013.

2 Bas Heijne

Bas Heijne, a Dutch publicist and author, can be considered an active user of Twitter. His account has 9413 followers and he follows 35 accounts himself.³ Despite these amounts being variable, their ratio is indicative for a kind of celebrity status on Twitter. The number of people who follow his account greatly exceeds the number of accounts Heijne follows himself. Anyone can subscribe to his tweets, but as we can infer from his ‘public displays of connection’ (Donath and boyd 2004) Heijne himself seems to prefer following writers and colleagues involved in various types of media.⁴ According to Donath (1998, 2007) profile and displayed connections are important cues for viewers regarding credibility and reliability. In Heijne’s case, one would expect him, being someone who is relatively well-known, to follow other well-known people as a confirmation that his online identity corresponds with his offline identity. Compared to the 259.200 potential readers⁵ of his weekly column in *NRC Handelsblad*⁶ the 9413 followers on Twitter seem to make up a rather marginal group. However, unlike the (online) readers of the newspaper, followers on Twitter have the opportunity to directly respond to Heijne’s off- and online activities. This has an important implication for the problematic notion of the public (Marwick and boyd 2011), as it makes the audience more visible. Those who respond to an idea or activity show that they have read or taken an interest in what Heijne does, and can easily be identified by their (user)name. It follows that it would be interesting to have a closer look at the activity on Heijne’s Twitter account, to see what his tweets look like and who responds to them.

To get a better understanding of how Heijne uses Twitter to spread ideas we will look at what he posts and who responds to his messages. A distinction between three different categories of Twitter usage will be proposed here: promotion, communicative interactivity and informative interactivity. The first category refers to the tweets Heijne uses as announcements of his work, often including hyperlinks that direct to other websites where his work or information about his activities as a public intellectual can be found. The objective of these kinds of tweets is solely to promote Heijne’s work or activities. This is not limited to merely selling his work but is part of the public intellectual’s endeavor to indeed be public and hence to foster the public debate. The second type, communicative interactivity, refers to discussions, whereby Twitter serves as a means and platform that enables those discussions. Despite the constraints of online discussions, Twitter will to a certain extent be proven to allow for intellectual discussion. The third type of usage, informative interactivity, refers to tweets in which Heijne links to other media for (background) information on topical issues or issues of

3 <http://twitter.com/bjheijne> on 1/4/2012. At the time of publishing these numbers have respectively increased to 25.800 and 45 (4 march 2014).

4 Three of which are not persons but organizations; five are (literary) writers or essayists; seventeen are journalist, columnist, or reporter for one or more types of media; two are (former) politicians; four are artists and four have other occupations.

5 Paid circulation *NRC Handelsblad* and *NRC Next*, 3rd quarter of 2011. Source: Het Oplage Instituut. <http://www.hoi-online.nl/> (Dutch).

6 <http://www.nrc.nl/> (Dutch).

interest. Similar to promotional usage these tweets often contain hyperlinks, but in this case the tweets are not meant to promote Heijne's own work. These types of usage additionally contribute to the construction of a professional online identity (Gilpin 2010). Although Gilpin discusses this identity building regarding public relation practitioners, it can be applied to other cases where one can expect identity construction to be more conscious. By sharing information and discussing with others Heijne can establish his online identity as a public intellectual.

2.1 *Methodology*

For the analysis, all Heijne's public posts on Twitter in the period from February until September 2011 have been considered (753), including replies (259) and retweets (252). This results in almost equal amounts of tweets (242), replies and retweets, as each category roughly comprises one third of the total amount of posts. The starting point has been the analysis of the tweets that Heijne uses to promote his work. The promotion of his book that has been published in April 2011 served as the central theme for this analysis. Further analysis of the remaining, non-promotional, tweets showed that they can roughly be subsumed into two other categories: tweets in which Heijne interacts with other Twitter users (categorized as communicative interactivity) and tweets in which Heijne provides his users with information or interpretations on topical events by including hyperlinks which direct to the source of information. These latter tweets make up the category informative interactivity. All tweets that will be discussed have been selected manually from Heijne's account and have been translated by the author. The tweets by 'Bjheijne' and his retweets 'RT' have been visible on his account, other tweets (mostly questions or replies by others) will be displayed in the discussion to reconstruct question-answer sequences or conversations in which Heijne participated.

3 Promotion

Part of the public intellectual's activity is self-popularization as a means to spread his ideas. The public intellectual does not only have to be aware of the tension between complexity and accessibility as has been discussed, self-popularization poses another tension: that between the public intellectual and his ideas. Unlike celebrity 'intellectuals', who according to Coser (1988: 18) are being appreciated not for their 'content or truth, but novelty or brilliance', it is exactly the content or truth of ideas that has to prevail for the public intellectual. In introducing more people to their ideas, public intellectuals have to stand out, yet without overshadowing their ideas with their personality. To be public they can for instance write a piece in a newspaper and appear on radio or television, yet they should cope with the tension in the sense that people should watch, read or listen because of the idea, and not because of a novel or eccentric personality. The internet has provided public intellectuals an additional tool to reach and expand their audience, by writing a blog or in online (editions of) newspapers and magazines. Due to its public nature, Twitter transcends the limitations regarding accessibility compared

to more traditional media as well. ‘Like many social network sites, Twitter flattens multiple audiences into one – a phenomenon known as “context collapse”’ (Marwick and boyd 2011: 122). The authors recognize that this makes it harder for users to target a message at a specific audience. However, a benefit of this phenomenon is that the public intellectual is no longer bound to the audience of one type of medium. We will explore how Heijne utilizes this character of Twitter. To show how tweets can be self-popularizing, we will consider the self-promotion of Heijne’s book *Moeten wij van elkaar houden? Het populisme ontleed*⁷ and related activities on Twitter. To illustrate this, a series of tweets regarding the promotion of his book will be discussed here. These tweets range from the announcement of the book presentation (on 21 April) to one month after the release of the book (on 26 April).

21 April Bjheijne: ‘27 April presentation Do we have to love each other? First copy will be offered to A. Pechtold. Press register at Bezige Bij, Erica van t Leven’ (retweeted by 5 people)⁸

22 April Bjheijne: ‘New book leaves the press this afternoon. Motto by Saul Bellow: “Maybe we are not strong enough to live in the present”’ (retweeted by 5 people)⁹

With these tweets Heijne announces the publication and presentation of his book. The first copy will be offered to Alexander Pechtold, a well-known Dutch liberal politician who is currently Member of Parliament and party leader of D66 (“*Democrats ’66*”). The call for the press to register at the publisher’s contact person indicates the formal character of this tweet. The motto in the second tweet serves as a teaser.

26 April Bjheijne: ‘Out: DO WE HAVE TO LOVE EACH OTHER? About Enlightenment and populism. Sarko. Sorkin. Sarrazin. Dostoyevsky. And Frank Visser LL.M..Bezige Bij’ (retweeted by 11 people)¹⁰

On April 26, Heijne announces the release of his book, in a way meant to arouse interest. Based on the names mentioned in this tweet we can expect a large variety of topics in his book. From politics (the French president Sarkozy), to art (Hollywood screenplay writer Sorkin and the Russian author Dostoyevsky), the immigration debate (the German politician and writer Sarrazin) and law and television (Frank Visser LL.M. being the Dutch equivalent of Judge Judy, solving civic rights disputes both in a television studio and on location).

27 April RT APechtold: ‘Just now @BezigeBij bookpresentation @BasHeijne “Do we have to love each other?” ... Populism analyzed #recommended’ (retweeted by 14 people)¹¹

This tweet by the well-known politician Alexander Pechtold can be considered as a public display of connection. It serves as excellent promotion for Heijne’s book, at least insofar people approve Pechtold’s stance and solidifies Heijne’s position as a public intellectual that is to be taken seriously.

28 April RT LodewijkA: ‘@Bjheijne I would like to congratulate you with your nice book via dm [direct-private- message], instead I do so hereby’¹²

7 Translation: “*Do we have to love each other? Populism dissected*”. Heijne 2011.

Another politician, at the time of writing executive councillor of Amsterdam Lodewijk Asscher, approves of Heijne's book. Only on 1 May does Heijne reply, with a spare 'thanks'.^{vii} This might be Heijne's way of demonstrating that he is not committed to a political party. The fact that he does not follow Asscher on Twitter, and only two politicians, one of which is a former politician, might underscore that Heijne does not want to be caught expressing his political preference. The public intellectual's aim to stay detached will be discussed later in this section.

28 April RT APechtold: '@Bjheijne Again congratulations with your powerful analysis of populism. Tell #BezigeBij to send some 149 copies more to The Hague :-)' (retweeted by 6 people)^{vii}

Here we can see Alexander Pechtold expressing his approval again. Jokingly, he asks Heijne to send copies for the other members of the Dutch parliament. We will see that Heijne does not respond publicly until 5 May.

28 April tacoe: '@Bjheijne Can't wait! When will the e-book edition be released?'^{viii}

28 April Bjheijne: '@tacoe hm, don't really know whether there will be an e-book'^{ix}

Not only 'famous' people can send messages. This is a question of an interested reader. Like other social media that can be used as 'personal media', Twitter followers are able to easily interact with other users due to the symmetrical character of the medium (Lüders 2008). On the same day, someone else asks the same question, but this time Heijne answers 'not yet #alas'.^x On 18 June he announces that his 'Essay [book] appears to be available as e-book as well now'.^{xi} To get an impression of the book, a free preview is available on a book store's website. This gives Heijne the opportunity to promote his book by using its content, instead of merely its title.

28 April Bjheijne: 'prepublication of the first, um, rather personal chapter. <http://www.athenaeum.nl/boek-van-de-nacht/bas-heijne-moeten-wij-van-elkaar-houden>' (retweeted by 11 people)^{xii}

Following this we see the first response of a quick reader, someone who is not particularly famous but who has been involved as one of the initiators with the series of 'layman sermons' in which Heijne participated in 2008.⁸

28 RT April Ranfarkouwijzer: 'read #dowehavetoloveeachother by @bjheijne in one go Beautiful! It starts and ends with Apostle Paul and also discusses Heijnes #laymansermon' (retweeted by 4 people)^{xiii}

Although Heijne regularly writes for *NRC Handelsblad* he does not hesitate to make trips to the *NRC Next*,⁹ NRC's morning newspaper aimed at a younger audience. In this way those readers also have an opportunity to be introduced to Heijne's book.

28 April Bjheijne: 'Tomorrow opening NRCNext with a chapter taken from DO WE, etc. Why comparisons with WWII can exactly be a manner of looking away' (retweeted by 7 people)^{xiv}

8 http://preekvandeleeck.nl/index.php/leken/leek/bas_heijne/ (Dutch – 15 August 2013)

9 <http://www.nrcnext.nl/> (Dutch).

29 April Bjheijne: 'Prepublication do we have to love each other? Today in NRCnext'. (retweeted by 6 people)^{xv}

Another less well-known reader promotes Heijne's book, by posting a witty tweet in which she refers to the complaints about unnecessary and expensive 'left-wing hobbies' such as art, by the PVV ('*Party for Freedom*').

28 April RT anneroelofsen: '@APechtold encourages Chamber to left-wing hobbies "reading" and "thinking". Thanks to @Bjheijne. #149copies' (retweeted by 6 people)^{xvi}

Unlike the earlier tweets that Heijne responded to (the congratulations by Ascher and the questions regarding the e-book) the following tweets comprise a short talk on a substantive topic. This talk illustrates that Heijne is not reluctant to respond to readers, and is an early example of communicative interactivity, a category of tweets that will be discussed more extensively later. What is important to note here is that Heijne plugs his article in *NRC Next* and promotes his broader work by explicitly mentioning a publication. By referring to other work Heijne simultaneously tries to clarify his stance and correct the reader. The latter is important in protecting his reputation since he does not want to be associated with remarkably populist anti-populism, but have a more thorough debate on the issue. This is a good example of identity construction on Twitter.

29 April wawa_chi: 'Gut feeling is less appropriate for political discourse @Bjheijne Gut feeling is a fact but should have to lead to a visit to the toilet'^{xvii}

29 April Bjheijne: '@wawa_chi mind, in my article in [NRC]NEXT the word GUT FEELING does not appear. It is not a word that I myself would use'^{xviii}

The debate that Heijne is aiming at with his book is performed through different types of media. BNR is a Dutch news radio station and apparently someone will respond to his book in the Reformed newspaper *Nederlands Dagblad* ('*Dutch Newspaper*'). A television debate with the former Labour Party mayor of Amsterdam Job Cohen will follow.

29 April Bjheijne: 'Debate about essay starts, left and right: Monday BNR with Francisco v Jole. Tomorrow B-J Spruyt will respond in ND. Later on a tv-debate with Cohen'^{xix}

2 May RT 2525: 'At 11 o'clock on BNR debating with @bjheijne about his essay 'Do we have to love each other?' <http://goo.gl/LQzQR>' (retweeted by 6 people)^{xx}

A week after the release of the essay one of the first reviews appears in the online culture magazine *8Weekly Webmagazine*.¹⁰ Referring to this independent recommendation is a good means to promote his book. Heijne can decide which reviews he wants to display on his Twitter account by whether or not (re)tweeting them.

3 May Bjheijne: 'Review: Do we have to love each other? Populism analyzed. Read the complete article here non... <http://bit.ly/ltaPdN>' (retweeted by 8 people)^{xxi}

On the same day, a reader asks Heijne a question with respect to the subject-matter of his book. Heijne explains what he means. This again provisionally illustrates the communicative interactive use of Twitter.

10 <http://www.8weekly.nl/> (Dutch).

3 May juubke: '@Bjheijne in NRC May 2 #deartoask: anti-enlightenment culture, is that the same as left wing hobby / Art-culture? #contradiction?'^{xxii}

3 May Bjheijne: '@juubke no, in contemporary populism art is not culture, except perhaps the Concertgebouw. Everything else is strange to the people and misuse'^{11, xxiii}

Similar to the former tweet, Heijne sets something straight in this sequence of tweets below. In the first tweet Heijne finally replies to Pechtold's tweet on 28 April in which he requested Heijne to send more copies of his book to the Dutch parliament. Mind that 5 May is the Dutch Liberation Day, this explains why oubelkas uses the hashtag 'freedom'.

5 May Bjheijne: 'For a moment I considered to provide the 149 copies requested by @Apechtold for the Second Chamber with a personal dedication' (retweeted by 1 person)^{xxiv}

5 May oubelkas: '@Bjheijne @Apechtold and then for every politician a special dedication? Would be great! :) #freedom'^{xxv}

5 May Bjheijne: '@oubelkas it was a bit ironic Joseph'^{xxvi}

On 7 May Heijne announces a television appearance in a political discussion program together with two young politicians, who he instead of the grammatically correct 'politici' calls 'politico's', which sounds more trendy.

7 May Bjheijne: 'Tomorrow in Buitenhof a conversation with two young politico's from CDA and PvdA in response to my essay on populism and enlightenment'. (retweeted by 11 people)^{xxvii}

In this program¹² Heijne states that he is not a member of a political party because he likes to keep an open mind, to prevent him from coloring his writing with his political preferences. Here we can hear the public intellectual speak, who, although being engaged, 'holds resolutely to a posture of detachment [...] and regards direct political involvement as something that would compromise his very being as an intellectual' (Melzer et al. 2003: 4). Of course, this does not mean that Heijne is completely neutral, just that he is not bound to a particular political agenda in his writing. After the broadcast Heijne again refers to the online publication of the first chapter of his book.

8 May Bjheijne: 'Bas Heijne, Do we have to love each other? (prepublication) – Athenaeum Book store athenaeum.nl/boek-van-de-nacht/bas-heijne-moeten-wij-van-elkaar-houden' (retweeted by 4 people)^{xxviii}

Heijne announces the recording of the debate with Cohen (and promotes a literary festival in Amsterdam). The next tweet is sent by the television program *Schepper & Co aan Tafel* ('Creator & Co at the Table' – regarding philosophy, religion and spirituality) to promote its edition in which Bas Heijne and Job Cohen appear. On the same day Heijne repeats this announcement from his own account.

11 'Misuse' is a translation of the Dutch word 'misbruik', which usually means 'abuse'. Heijne does not make clear what this 'misuse' means here. It probably refers to misuse of public money as in the populist view high art is not accessible or understandable to the 'people', hence high art is not part of culture, which is associated with popular and low art. Consequently, spending public money on (high)art is misuse of the people's money.

12 <http://www.uitzendinggemist.nl/afleveringen/1101363> (Dutch – 15 August 2013).

9 May Bjheijne: 'will in a bit be debating for the program "Schepper & Co". Tonight the Rode Hoed is filled with hipsters and new nerds: LITERATURFEST. Free Entrance' (retweeted by 2 people)^{xxxix}

16 May RT SchepperTafel: '@JobCohen and @bjheijne in a debate about the causes of and dealing with #populism, led by Jacobine Geel see <http://bit.ly/cVrULv>'^{xxx}

16 May Bjheijne: 'will in a bit be debating with Job Cohen about my essay Do we, etc. at Schepper aan Tafel, Ned 2' (retweeted by 1 person)^{xxxi}

Here is someone who is enthusiastic about the broadcast and recommends it to her contacts. For some reason she does not speak of 'love' but 'cherish' each other when she refers to the title of Heijne's book.

15 May marlindek: "'Do we have to cherish each other?" With Job Cohen & Bas Heijne. (good!) www.schepperencotv.ncrv.nl/ncrvgemist/16-5-2011/schepper-co-aan-tafel'^{xxxii}

Last but not least, we will consider a tweet about a review of the book by an on-line publicist, retweeted by Heijne. In this tweet, the publicist hints at the tweet in which Heijne promoted his book 'on Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard'.

23 May RT mirias: 'On "Do we have to love each other?" by @bjheijne on @humanverbond <http://bit.ly/jBF7ao> (and on Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard)'^{xxxiii}

Several types of tweets can be distinguished here, though they all serve promotional purposes. First Heijne's own tweets, which can be mere announcements (21st April), 'teasers' in an attempt to arouse interest (26th April) or previews (28th April: the online prepublication). There are also tweets of others that Heijne retweets, be it famous people (Apechtold) or less well-known people (Ranfarkouwijzer). These retweets of tweets in which Heijne's (user)name is mentioned are known as 'ego retweets' (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010: 9). Heijne can use this kind of tweets as more or less objective references, just like the online review that he refers to. Twitter is well-suited to direct followers to other types of online media (articles, radio clips, television programs etc). Heijne utilizes this feature well in promoting his book, when he refers to appearances on television, radio or elsewhere. By adding these references to his account, mostly via hyperlinks, he simultaneously builds his own repository on themes that he affiliates with for future access by himself or others.

To discuss the potential impact that Heijne has with these promotional tweets we can consider the amount of retweets: the tweets that people copy in order to share them with their own followers, who do not necessarily follow Heijne. In addition to informing others, people also retweet to amplify a message, to publicly agree with someone, to comment on the original tweet, to attract attention to themselves and as a way of content curation.¹³ In our analysis the amount of retweets is displayed after the discussed tweets. In cases where the amount is not mentioned, there are either no retweets or it is a retweet by Heijne himself. The number of retweets in most other cases does not exceed ten. This does not necessarily imply that the same amount of people have read the tweet, just that less people found the tweet interesting or important enough to retweet it. Hence, only part of Heijne's public can be traced: the majority of his followers may read his

13 boyd, Golder and Lotan (2010) distinguish ten different reasons for retweeting a tweet.

tweets but do not retweet them.¹⁴ The same goes for people who do not follow Heijne but do read his tweets (Marwick and boyd 2011: 4). In theory, the amount of people who read a tweet that has been retweeted can rapidly increase (e.g. one person with fifty followers who also have fifty followers may reach a potential public of $50 * 50 = 2500$ people).

Although the impact that Heijne has may seem marginal based on the amount of retweets, the interactive feature of Twitter can be considered very valuable: it brings the intellectual closer to his public, and the public (partly) becomes visible. By mentioning Heijne's username people can invite him to engage in a (brief) conversation. As we have seen Heijne is not reluctant to respond to practical questions nor to all kinds of remarks or other questions from his readers. In the following we will see that he does not hesitate to enter into discussions either. This discussion illustrates the communicative interactive aspect of Twitter, the initial function of Twitter.¹⁵

4 Communicative Interactivity

On 4 September 2011 Heijne enters a discussion on Twitter. This discussion is not entirely visible on Heijne's account as it takes place in the 'common space of social exchange' that Twitter offers (Gilpin 2010: 234). The discussion is about Heijne's newspaper column called 'Crisis',¹⁶ in which he states that the Dutch discussion about the economical 'euro' crisis has been hijacked by the discussion about multiculturalism. Solidarity between EU nations is being undermined because of this debate, where populist parties call for the near-bankrupt countries to be restricted in their loans by other countries and to be forced out of the euro. This obviously distracts from the urgent need for a solution to the economical crisis. According to Heijne, the euro crisis should be acknowledged not merely as an economic crisis. Only when it is recognized as a cultural matter too can it be solved.

The discussion about Heijne's column starts between Heijne's former colleagues at NRC Eric Smit (a journalist and founder of one of the free Dutch newspapers) and Heleen Mees (a worldly-wise third wave feminist, lawyer, economist and publicist). For clarity's sake the course of this discussion will be summarized here, although it has not been visible in its entirety on Heijne's account because part of it took place on the accounts of Smit and Mees. It starts with a positive remark on Heijne's column by Smit to which Mees, who obviously wants to get more into the subject-matter, replies. Smit seems in favor of Heijne, Mees is more critical. The conversation develops as a common discussion between a neo-liberalist (Mees) and someone who does not necessarily disprove of government or EU intervention.

11.56 RT EricChrSmit: 'Bas Heijne hits a raw nerve in his column in NRC Handelsblad <http://www.nrc.nl/heijne/2011/09/03/crisis/> via @nrc' (retweeted by 19 people)^{xxxiv}

14 See: <http://mashable.com/2009/02/17/twitter-retweets/#> (15 August 2013).

15 <http://www.thedailyanchor.com/2009/02/12/a-conversation-with-twitter-co-founder-jack-dorsey/> (15 August 2013).

16 <http://www.nrc.nl/heijne/2011/09/03/crisis/> (Dutch – 15 August 2013).

13.20 HeleenMees: '@EricChrSmit But why, in the case of the budget cuts on culture, does Bas by definition not want to do what the people want and in the case of [saving] the euro he does? Mere personal preference?'^{xxxv}

Mees responds with a remark that is not directly applicable to this particular column, since it does not address the cutbacks on art. It supposedly is a general impression that she has of Heijne, based on earlier columns or other writings. Smit defends Heijne by disproving the remark that Mees makes: he has understood the intention of the column differently. The discussion evolves in this direction and ends when Mees does not reply anymore. But then, half an hour later, Heijne suddenly responds to set something straight. Since Smit is probably no longer available at that time to chat, Mees continues her discussion with Heijne. He appears to know her stance, and in foresight he jokingly asks her not to bring up Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who can be associated with neo-liberal/libertine ideas. Heijne probably does this in an attempt to keep her on topic. Then Mees tries to provoke Heijne (from distant New York, where she lives) by proposing to start using the guilder again instead of the euro. However, she does not succeed and Heijne tries to continue the discussion reasonably, but it seems that Mees has no good reply. Eventually, she concludes with a dim statement, that ends the discussion.

14.22 Bjheijne: '@HeleenMees @EricChrSmit nonsense. Both my points of view lead back to underestimating the meaning of culture, based on hatred or blindness #consistent'^{xxxvi}

14.26 HeleenMees: '@Bjheijne @EricChrSmit Then you unquestioningly assume that the current subsidies for art are ideal, and more money for culture is always better'^{xxxvii}

14.27 Bjheijne: '@HeleenMees well no. But it was about the necessity of more Europe to save the euro, I suppose. Don't bring up dsk [Dominique Strauss-Kahn] now :-)'^{xxxviii}

14.30 HeleenMees: '@Bjheijne He would be able to save the euro, I guess. But if "culture" is an argument against the euro then we should just go back to the guilder'^{xxxix}

14.33 Bjheijne: '@HeleenMees I am not saying that ,culture' is the norm for everything, I observe that it is consequently being ignored by left- and right-wing politics'^{xl}

14.35 Bjheijne: '@HeleenMees with the consequence that the emotions rise all the more. The one who pleads for a federal Europe is willfully blind. Irresponsible'^{xli}

14.36 HeleenMees: '@Bjheijne Long live dsk, who combines left, right & popular'^{xlii}

Despite the perception of Twitter as a superficial medium, this discussion gives us the opportunity to investigate to what extent Twitter also allows for intellectual content. Of course, it is always more difficult to have a conversation or discussion with someone who is in a different place. The advantage of Twitter is that in this case Heijne can easily enter the discussion because the other discussers mention his username, which can make him aware that people are talking about him (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010: 2). Notice that Heijne retweets the 'ego message' that starts the discussion. A difficulty, similar to regular online chatting, is the time lapse: some messages are delayed, which results in the loss of chronology. This may be amplified on Twitter, compared to offline discussions because the medium is not especially designed to support discussions (Honeycutt and Herring: 1). However, this does not occur in the displayed summary. The discussion

does prove that it is more complicated to adapt to each other's arguments or topics. This enhances people talking at cross purposes and it seems that the discussion ends sooner because there is neither space nor time to approach each other. In addition, there is less opportunity on Twitter to exhaustively deal with every participant's stance and arguments than in a face-to-face discussion. Although an apparent disadvantage, it simultaneously constitutes a benefit of discussions on Twitter: people have to be concise, so there is no space and time for vague language in the heat of a discussion. Considering this, the communicative interactive aspect of Twitter leaves room for intellectual discussions, although those discussions take another form than offline discussions. It may seem as if Heijne takes more time for discussions with well-known persons, but the persons involved in the discussion happen to be part of his closer connections. According to Gilpin (2010: 234) 'at-replies' or 'mentions', messages directly addressed to another user via *@username*, indicate a closer connection. As his former colleagues Mees and Smit are among the few who are followed by Heijne, which similarly points to a stronger tie. The longer discussion then seems to result more from the closer connection rather than their fame. Overall Heijne seems to respond to all kinds of tweets by all sorts of people, not just to tweets of well-known persons or tweets posted by his closer connections.

This approachable reputation based on Heijne's responsiveness is amplified by the public character of Twitter. Unlike shows on radio or television, where the audience is only sometimes allowed to participate in a discussion, Twitter provides every user the opportunity to join in on a conversation by retweeting a message or using a particular hashtag. On the one hand these messages are dispersed because they are sent by users who are not necessarily connected, on the other hand these messages are tied by the same hashtag or topic. Users can also start spin-offs of discussions by adding other hashtags that indicate the subtopic of their tweet, which gives users more freedom to enter an existing discussion from a particular angle. Besides this freedom regarding content, discussions on Twitter are neither bound by a certain time limit as the medium is both direct (like a telephone conversation) and asynchronous (like correspondence via letters) (Dennis et al. 2008, Donath 2007, Lüders 2008). Late repliers run the risk of missing out on a discussion that has already ended, but in theory a conversation can go on as long as users keep adding new arguments or additional information via tweets.

5 Informative Interactivity

As we have seen, Twitter provides Heijne with the opportunity to promote his book in many different ways. Despite the interactive character of some of these tweets, they can be subsumed under promotional tweets because they serve to promote Heijne's writings. There are also tweets in which Heijne shares background information on (topical) events. These can be considered as solely informative interactive tweets. We will now discuss this kind of tweets. This discussion also provides the opportunity to examine the intellectual potential of Twitter some more, depending on what is behind the tweets. In order to demonstrate this, we will look at some tweets concerning the Arabic Spring in 2011.

On 11 February Heijne posted the following tweet as a complaint about the Dutch media that covered the events in Egypt. This can be considered as a sort of informative interactivity, though it only refers to Dutch public television at that point in time, and does not directly link to a video that proves his point.

11 February Bjheijne: 'Are the public broadcasting stations really unable to find someone for the reporting on Egypt who genuinely knows what he is talking about? #football commentary' (retweeted by 14 people)^{xl.iii}

As we can infer from this tweet, Heijne is clearly annoyed by the way of reporting. A week later Heijne announces his column with a phrase taken from that column. Notice the large amount of retweets, which indicates that the tweet apparently appealed to many people (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010: 6). On the day of the publication he links to the column on the NRC website.

18 February Bjheijne: 'Tomorrow in NRC: „The sickness called Holland” (retweeted by 1 person)^{xl.iv} declaring the west superior because the islam has no Mozart, at the same time doing away with an orchestra playing Mozart as a “little trombone club for the elite” (retweeted by more than 100 people)^{xl.v}

19 February Bjheijne: 'NRC today: <http://weblogs.nrc.nl/heijne/2011/02/19/de-ziekte-die-holland-heet/>' (retweeted by 69 people)^{xl.vi}

In this column, an extensive analysis of the current Dutch conjuncture leads to an explanation for the poor reporting on the revolts. Heijne draws attention to the feeling of national dissatisfaction that moves through The Netherlands, which also served as the motive for writing his book. This 'sickness' is a sense of mourn for the loss of the country's cultural autonomy in a big, threatening and globalizing world. Clever gestures in response to this feeling have made some political parties blatantly opportunistic and inconsistent. The pvv ('*Party for Freedom*') for instance launched a proposal to tax headscarves after they proposed to ban them. In the same line of reasoning we can see the pvv's disparaging both the Islam for lacking a Mozart and a Dutch orchestra for being elite, the contradiction that was mentioned in Heijne's tweet.

According to Heijne, the populist conception that the outside world is too large and threatening has reached beyond politics and has affected the media. Besides entertainment shows with a focus on the Dutch ('I love Holland', 'The Voice of Holland etc.') populism has also affected serious genres like the news. As a result, in the reporting on major foreign issues nobody seems to know how to approach these topics. Everything has to be 'clear and cozy', nothing is allowed to be serious or difficult. Consequently:

The reports on the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt by the public broadcasting stations were a mockery. Instead of news and contemplation there was mere vague impressionism, broadcast after broadcast. [...] Every serious interpretation was lacking. Worse – the idea that something as serious interpretation exists seemed to be missing. It is withal hard to contemplate when you have declared your own limited perception to be the measure of all things.¹⁷

17 Heijne, B. February 19th, 2011. <http://weblogs.nrc.nl/heijne/2011/02/19/de-ziekte-die-holland-heet/> (Dutch – 15 August 2013). Translation by MvL.

It is not hard to sense annoyance and disapproval in this column. Though, compared to his initial quote with the reproach of football commentary, Heijne takes a step back from his somewhat emotional tweet to make room for a well-thought, rational analysis of the cause for the bad reporting (which he pursues in his book). This development from annoyance to social criticism can be regarded as a considerable move as a public intellectual. Twitter allows this process of increased reflection and makes it visible. Hence it is not a mere superficial medium that leaves no room for intellectual activity. The communicative and informative interactivity provide the medium with more depth.

Although the discussed tweets refer to topical events and not just to Heijne's writings, the focus remains on his own columns. Obviously, there is more to say on the issues concerning the Arabic Spring which he addresses in other ways. Coincidentally, in a series of interviews with renowned international intellectuals for *NRC Handelsblad*, Heijne gets to interview John Gray, who predicted that revolution was inevitable. We should expect more, not just a political revolution in the Arab World, but a revolution as an answer to the financial crisis in the Western world as well. By interviewing him, Heijne can introduce the readers of *NRC Handelsblad* to Gray's ideas.

28 January Bjheijne: 'Everything will die or break down. Be prepared for the next revolution (via @nrc) <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/01/28/alles-gaat-dood-of-kapot-zet-uschrap-voor-de-volgende-revolutie/>' (retweeted by 6 people)^{XLVI}

One month later, Heijne tweets a link to an article on the website of the New York Times that deals with the future of Al Qaida after the fall of despotic regimes. If it would collapse, the USA would have to change their attitude towards particular Muslim countries, as they could no longer serve as frightening countries with explosive violence that require military intervention to make the Americans feel safe and secure.

28 February Bjheijne: 'Clear. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/28/world/middleeast/28qaeda.html?_r=1' (retweeted by 9 people)^{XLVII}

A couple of days later, Heijne retweets a message of Petra Stienen, a former human rights diplomat in the Middle-East who appeared in the Dutch media to explain the events during the Arabic Spring. She tweeted a hyperlink to an article on the website of the Guardian that explains why the Western world should not intervene in the process towards democracy, and definitely not try to keep things the way they were.

1 March RT Petra_stienen: 'For all of us eager to help the change in the Arab world: guardian editorial on the limits of intervention <http://bit.ly/eCqS5U>' (retweeted by 30 people)^{XLIX}

With these tweets Heijne tries to spread information and explanations of topical events, which is something that many people do on Twitter. The difference is that as a public intellectual, besides feeling the need to share and foster knowledge and critical thoughts, Heijne can have a bigger impact because he has more followers than others. Also, the people who read his messages (especially his followers) will most probably acknowledge his role as a public intellectual, and consequently value his view more and ascribe more importance to his tweets. As with

the promotional tweets, we see that Heijne can fill his 'micro-blog', that Twitter in essence is, as a kind of curator to constitute his own public repository. He can post or retweet tweets to promote his work by posting references to his work and responses to his work, or, as the communicative interactive has shown, by entering into discussions on his work which are visible on his account. In the tweets that have been discussed in this section on informative interactivity, he provides his followers with alternatives for the lack of serious interpretation of the Arabic Spring by the Dutch media. This shows how Heijne takes his responsibility as a public intellectual: he does not just complain about a certain state of affairs but provides better alternatives by expressing his own contemplations and by offering his readers good examples of 'serious interpretation'. As we have seen, Twitter allows Heijne to display the iterative process from complaint, via tweets and columns to his book. Because of the context collapse in Twitter he can refer to almost any other type of medium. By acting as an online curator of intellectual material and consciously building his own repository, Heijne at the same time constitutes his online identity as a public intellectual (Marwick and boyd 2011).

6 Interactive, but intellectual?

Let us, by way of conclusion, consider to what extent Heijne's use of Twitter can be intellectual. In the case of the promotional opportunities it matters what is behind the tweets: some tweets refer to a whole different medium, such as a television debate or an article. These references can be intellectual. As for the communicative interactivity, the discussions between Smit, Mees and Heijne have illustrated that an intellectual conversation is possible on Twitter, up to a certain point. The intellectual extent of informative interactivity resembles that of the promotional use: what matters is what is behind the tweets. We have seen that Twitter shows Heijne developing his arguments during a process of reflection. Starting with an apparent singular remark which expressed annoyance in a tweet we have seen Heijne's column that tentatively explains the remark and eventually a book that serves as a more extensive exploration, interpretation and explanation of the effects that contemporary populism has on society.

Still, separate tweets (not part of a sequence of reflection) can have an intellectual character as well. Heijne presents himself as a public intellectual when he tweets witty remarks, such as the following.

5 March Bjheijne: '[In] NRC: carnival comedian Cnoops does not dare to tell jokes about the pvv. Where is Hans Teeuwen? [Dutch comedian who is known to have little boundaries]' (retweeted by 8 people)⁵

8 May Bjheijne: 'Fukuyama: „Political institutions often arise coincidental. Remarkable to hear from a man who has been accused of determinism in the past' (retweeted by 5 people)⁶

8 September Bjheijne: 'Almost all anger in the Netherlands is about feelings of moral superiority of others. Those are dealt with in a morally superior way' (retweeted by 32 people)⁷

The analysis of Heijne's tweets has shown how he deals with the challenges that a public intellectual faces: being accessible without compromising the intellectual too much (Posner), being engaged and at the same time detached (Melzer et al.) and keeping a balance between public personality and ideas (Coser). Concerning the latter, we have seen that in Heijne's tweets the ideas prevail. Though, Heijne uses Twitter to display a certain personality as well, for instance in his replies to his followers that show him as an approachable person. Besides that, his tweets on topical events demonstrate a social and political engagement. Despite this engagement, Heijne prefers detachment from politics, as we can deduce from particular utterances and the absence of politicians among the people who he follows. Finally, as for the balance between intellectuality and accessibility we have seen that Heijne uses Twitter as a concise means to supply his followers with comprehensive ideas such as in blogs or (online) articles. The public and interactive character of Twitter have shown to be useful to this end. Heijne uses the public aspect to promote the intellectual and in this way joins these two. He shows a responsibility to further the debate and to introduce the public to the ideas of (inter)national intellectuals. All these traits, displayed in his use of Twitter, contribute to Heijne's online identity as a public intellectual.

Although the analysis is a case-study, Heijne's tweets demonstrate the potential use of Twitter for intellectual purposes. Despite the restriction of 140 characters per tweet, his tweets show that besides posting witty, intellectual remarks as food for thought and sharing more profound information through hyperlinks it is even possible to have intellectual discussions on Twitter. The three categories of Twitter messages that are proposed in this article provide a useful distinction when analyzing someone's use of the medium. They demonstrate that it is possible for a public intellectual to promote his work and himself, communicate and interact with his audience and inform or opiate. Further discussion of this distinction shows that a public intellectual can use Twitter without compromising the balance between accessibility to the audience and complexity of his ideas. These types of usage combined with the public and accessible character of Twitter make it a useful medium for the public intellectual in his endeavor to spread intellectual ideas among a large audience.

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Tweets

- I <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/61008433729638401>
- II <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/61457102157262848>
- III <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/62880742576898048>
- IV <http://twitter.com/#!/APechtold/status/63292719035977729>
- V <http://twitter.com/#!/LodewijkA/status/63484742456188928>
- VI <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/64482383478538240>
- VII <http://twitter.com/#!/APechtold/status/6349236776797984>
- VIII <http://twitter.com/#!/taco/status/63526626360688641>
- IX <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63526972692774912>
- X <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63601753379180547>
- XI <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/82018521948758016>
- XII <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63557538888691714>
- XIII <http://twitter.com/#!/ranfarkouwijzer/status/63590423951720448>
- XIV <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63669052379369472>
- XV <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63875268045049856>
- XVI <http://twitter.com/#!/anneroelofsen/status/63838898207465472>
- XVII http://twitter.com/#!/wawa_chi/status/63868713476161536
- XVIII <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63870270129180672>
- XIX <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/63934438681219072>
- XX <http://twitter.com/#!/2525/status/64953530649284610>
- XXI <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/65309604598386688>
- XXII <http://twitter.com/#!/juubke/status/65314123835113472>
- XXIII <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/65315011169488897>
- XXIV <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/66061266019561472>
- XXV <http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/66062370337849344>

XXVI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/66062490676625408
XXVII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/66867248266100736
XXVIII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/67309265999757313
XXIX	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/67544679524212736
XXX	http://twitter.com/#!/SchepperTafel/status/70096205719416832
XXXI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/70138798700363776
XXXII	http://twitter.com/#!/marlindek/status/70161668553973761
XXXIII	http://twitter.com/#!/mirias/status/72632549721128960
XXXIV	http://twitter.com/#!/EricChrSmit/status/110290128899031040
XXXV	http://twitter.com/#!/HeleenMees/status/110311262377869312
XXXVI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/110326911225434112
XXXVII	http://twitter.com/#!/HeleenMees/status/110327840876134400
XXXVIII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/110328183777263616
XXXIX	http://twitter.com/#!/HeleenMees/status/110328878643412992
XL	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/110329608016117760
XLI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/110330049168814080
XLII	http://twitter.com/#!/HeleenMees/status/110330347731951616
XLIII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/36113746464219137
XLIV	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/38566783287824384
XLV	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/38570373717041152
XLVI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/38870852187463680
XLVII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/31034729885077504
XLVIII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/42218195800686592
XLIX	http://twitter.com/#!/petra_stienen/status/42501632755376128
L	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/43957605567176704
LI	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/67247273133867009
LII	http://twitter.com/#!/Bjheijne/status/111739948901732352

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