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Re-examining the Public Sphere: Democracy and the role of the Media

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Situated between the state and civil society, the role of the public sphere is seen to be one of mediating between the two through the circulation of information, ideas, and the subsequent formation and propagation of public opinion. However, there is an ambivalence within conceptions of the public sphere in terms of how it is to best effect this mediation. This sense of ambiguity in the understandings of the public sphere is a reflection of a deeply rooted and unresolved tension about whether democracy should mean some kind of popular power or an aid to decision-making. This dissertation argues that defining democracy as a political method provides a means by which to navigate the ambiguity imbued within current understandings of the function of the public sphere. Understanding democracy as a public, instrumental process underscores the extent to which the character of the public sphere should be seen as being derived from and shaped by the institutions and practices that make up the state. Of all the institutions within the public sphere, it is within perceptions of the media that the conceptual tensions underlying the public sphere and democratic theory are best reflected. While the media are a major forum for political communication, the nature of this forum remains theoretically underdeveloped and conceptually misconceived in the literature. It is the contention of this dissertation that the political role of the media should not be understood in relation to some abstract idea of democracy and public opinion, but rather in contrast with and connection to the concrete political institutions and practices of democracy.

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Situé entre l'État et la société civile, l'espace public est perçu comme un médiateur entre ces deux entités, rôle concrétisé par la circulation des informations et des idées et par l'émergence et la propagation de l'opinion publique qui s'ensuit. Il existe toutefois une ambivalence entre les conceptions de l'espace public quant à sa façon d'exercer le meilleur effet possible sur cette médiation. L'ambiguïté perçue dans les différentes compréhension de l'espace public reflète l'existence d'une tension solidement enracinée et non résolue quant à la signification de la démocratie : cette dernière constitue-t-elle un type de pouvoir populaire, ou un appui à la prise de décisions? Cette thèse soutient que le fait de définir la démocratie comme une méthode politique permet de "comprendre" l'ambiguïté inscrite dans la compréhension actuelle du rôle de l'espace public. Comprendre la démocratie comme un processus public et utilitaire permet de voir dans quelle mesure la nature de l'espace public doit être perçue comme dérivée des institutions et pratiques qui constituent l'État, et modelée par elles. Parmi l'ensemble des institutions faisant partie de l'espace public, c'est dans la perception des médias que les tensions conceptuelles sous-jacentes à l'espace public et à la théorie démocratique se reflètent le mieux. Alors que les médias **sont** un important forum de communication politique, la nature de ce forum demeure théoriquement sous-développée et fait l'objet d'une mauvaise interprétation conceptuelle dans les écrits. Cette thèse soutient principalement que le rôle politique des médias ne devrait pas être compris en fonction de perceptions abstraites de démocratie et d'opinion publique, mais plutôt en contraste et en lien avec les institutions politiques réelles et les pratiques rattachées à la démocratie.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

> *Who has not heard of Mount Olympus, - that high abode of all the powers of type, that favoured seat of the great goddess Pica, that wondrous habitation of gods and devils, from whence, with ceaseless hum of steam and never-ending flow of Castilian ink, issue forth eighty thousand nightly edicts for the governance of a subject nation?*
>
> Anthony Trollope, The Warden

The overruling problem being addressed in this dissertation is the deeply rooted ambivalence present in Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere and its relationship to democratic political practice. Although the concept of the public sphere is employed freely in political and philosophical discourse, its precise meaning is often blurred by a casual usage that fails to distinguish the public sphere institutionally in terms of its practices and connection to the democratic process (Rodger, 1985, 204). Such imprecision arises, in part, because of the identification of the public sphere as a space at the intersection of political and social life, outside of the formal state apparatus, yet not immediately equivalent with civil society (Postone, 1992, 164). While not without difficulties, Habermas's version of the public sphere has nonetheless informed and inspired a great deal of critical engagement as well as a wide range of further research(1). In ideal terms, Habermas conceptualizes the ***public sphere*** as a domain of social life that is distinct from both state and market where individual citizens, whatever their personal status, can assemble to discuss and question their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are already and always embedded (Keane, 1984, 2). Characterizing it as a space that both permits and institutionally guarantees the subjection of the activities of the state to criticism, Habermas looks upon the public sphere as embodying the idea of rationalizing power through the medium of discussion. Moreover, he believes that the medium of this confrontation

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is itself significant: it was the *public* use of reason, as expressed by private individuals engaged in argument that was in principle open and unconstrained (Thompson, 1993, 176). Above all else, Habermas's concept of the public sphere insists upon the analytic centrality of reasoned, critical discussion and discourse: the public sphere exists in the active reasoning of the public. It is through this exchange of information and critical opinion that the public sphere becomes a space in which private individuals can exercise and actualize formal and informal control over the state.

But this is not how contemporary society operates. By means of an over-arching, if melancholic, historical narrative, Habermas traces the emergence and eventual decline of the liberal democratic *bourgeois* public sphere. The chrysalis of the bourgeois public sphere takes shape in what he calls the *representative publicity* of early absolutist states. The representative public sphere existed as an arena for the spectacle and display of authority: it is a form of "public power" that does not attempt to reflect the interests of the populace, but instead is designed to bear witness to the glory and majesty of the master (Cohen, 1979, 76). With the demise of feudalism and the emergence of commercial capitalism, the structure of the public sphere is changed by the rise of a new social class and the development of a Europe wide system of circulation for both commodities and information. Suspended between civil society and the state, new cultural institutions arising in urban centres - coffeehouses, clubs, reading and language societies, publishing companies, lecture halls, museums, journals and newspapers - brought into existence a new public world, what Habermas calls the bourgeois public sphere (Landes, 1988, 40). By the latter half of the nineteenth century a series of rapid social and institutional developments began to alter the conditions and premises upon which the bourgeois public sphere was based. The state began to assume a more interventionist character and took on more responsibility for supervising the welfare of its citizenry. With the advent of mass democracy, the public lost its exclusivity; its socio-discursive

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coherence fell apart with the inclusion, as citizens, of new groups whose diversity and heterogeneity - in terms of their cultural, economic and educational background - forcefully brings to the fore any questions of inequality that had previously been "bracketed" (Dahlgren, 1995, 8). For Habermas, the consequence of these developments was the re-feudalization of the public sphere: the public sphere effectively became a "managed show" where political and economic elites seek and cultivate the acclamatory assent of a population that is excluded from public discussion and the decision-making process (Thompson, 1990, 113)

While fully cognizant of the flaws present in the historical embodiment of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas nevertheless argues for its enduring value because of the potential and capacity for self-transformation inherent in the principles by which it, in ideal terms, operates. A central element of Habermas's work is that embodied in the notion of the *bourgeois public sphere* are certain ideas and principles which still retain their relevance despite the developments and changes in public life since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paramount amongst these ideas is what Habermas sometimes refers to as the ***critical principle of publicity***, as distinct from the notion of ***publicity*** understood in the more modern sense of product promotion or advertising (Thompson, 1993, 179). Within the institutional infrastructure constituted by the standard liberal civil liberties - speech, press, association, thought, and communication - a space is established in which a *public opinion* could emerge through a process of open, rational-critical debate accessible to all and free from domination. In Habermas's view, individuals involved in this process come to see themselves as citizens not because they are striving to advance some individual and particular advantage in the policies of the state, and not because they are deeply involved with the beliefs and aims of some movement, but because in engaging others in open, *public* discussion, even argumentative discourse, they were contributing their knowledge to shaping a consensus that, to some degree, would eventually influence their elected representatives (Spinosa et al., 1997, 86).

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For Habermas, and others, this idea functions as a yardstick by which existing institutions and their practice might be measured and assessed. As well, for Habermas, the concept of the public sphere claims a double function: it provides a model for analysing historical change, while also serving as a normative category for political critique (Hohendahl, 1982, 246). That is, he understands the public sphere - or more precisely the **bourgeois public sphere** - as an *analytic category* that simultaneously indicates a specific social phenomenon as well as functioning as a conceptual device that aids the analysis and investigation of this phenomenon. In the first sense, the *public sphere* denotes a specific social and historical space that emerged concurrently with the development of capitalism in Western Europe. In the second sense, the *public sphere* functions as a vibrant continuum in which a variety of actors, institutional factors and discursive contexts are linked together in a cohesive theoretical framework (Dahlgren, 1991, 2).

Since the original publication of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas's argument has been subjected to vigorous criticism and analysis in regards to the historical and normative arguments it advances about the bourgeois public sphere. Some commentators see Habermas's concept of the public sphere as having an ambiguous status in his argument since his "stylized" historical analysis wavers between normative commentary and descriptive representation: the public sphere appears as both a normative ideal to be strived for and as a manifestation of actual historical circumstance in early bourgeois Europe. This sense of ambiguity is heightened by Habermas's retention of the bourgeois public sphere as an ideal at the same time that his analysis demonstrates the limitations and ideological distortions of this historical manifestation. Similarly, the veracity and accuracy of Habermas's characterization and depiction of the early press has also been questioned (Darnton, 1982; Garnham, 1992). It has been argued that Habermas doubly overstates his case, in that the discourse of the bourgeois public sphere did not manifest the high level of reasoned discourse that he suggests, and that the situation under advanced

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capitalism is not as bleak nor locked as he asserts (Dahlgren, 1991, 5). Habermas's account of the twentieth century does not include the kind of intellectual history that characterizes his approach to the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which he takes leading thinkers seriously and tries to recover the truth from their ideological distorted writings (Calhoun, 1992, 33). Conversely, his account of the earlier period does not look at the "penny dreadfuls", lurid crime and scandal sheets or other less than rational or critical manifestations of the press that were equally prevalent as those journals and periodicals that he focuses upon (***Op. Cit.***: see also Keane, 1991). Likewise, a number of feminist scholars have criticized not only the actual exclusion of women in the bourgeois public sphere, but also Habermas's negligence of this critical point in his consequent evaluation (see Fraser, 1987 & 1992; Landes, 1988; McLaughlin, 1993). They argue that the exclusion of women from the public sphere was not a matter of historical circumstance, but rather, was constitutive of its very nature. The bourgeois public sphere was essentially masculinist and this characteristic serves to determine both its self-representation and its subsequent structural transformation (Landes, 1988, 7).

The allure of Habermas's rendition of the public sphere is easy to understand since as a democratic ideal and a critical benchmark it is believed to provide both a normative expectation and cutting edge with which to interrogate the performance of institutions in the public sphere in relation to processes of public debate, opinion formation and representation (Cottle, 1995, 276). However, an examination of the principal points made by Habermas will reveal there are a number of underlying problems with the vision of deliberation and democratic politics that this model offers. As presently conceived, his vision of the ideal form of *critical publicity* is handicapped through its overt and covert coupling with a particular perception and construction of what constitutes a proper democratic and deliberative political practice as well as a correspondingly effective set of public institutions. Indeed, Habermas's understanding of the public sphere reflects the ongoing ambiguity over

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the form that democratic politics should take in terms of *authenticity* versus the practical compromises that must be made in order to accommodate and negotiate the logistics of the modern nation-state.

This dissertation will demonstrate that the sense of ambivalence surrounding the Habermasian conception of the public sphere and its role is a reflection of the larger, ongoing debate about the perils and possibilities of democracy within which discussions about the public sphere and its function are situated. In particular, this uncertainty is centred around what is meant and understood by democracy and how its goals and objectives are to be best practised and realized. In Habermas's view, the goal of politics should be rational agreement rather than compromise, and the decisive political act is that of engaging in public debate with a view to the development of a consensus: Democratic politics, in effect, becomes an end in itself (Elster, 1986, 103). Likewise, Habermas envisions the public sphere as a space in which the opinions and preferences of the public are transformed through a process of open, rational discussion. However, as this dissertation will illustrate, such a view produces a distorted picture of the public sphere in terms of how its role and character are to be perceived and understood. In both theory and application, politics is an activity that is defined by the practical purpose of what to *do* rather than the subject matter of what ought to be the case (Elster, 1986, 126). Individuals participate in the political process in order to achieve specific social, political and economic ends and goals: any satisfaction that they may derive from participation in the political process is parasitic upon decision-making (***Ibid.***). While democracy may or may not facilitate *liberty* or *equality* or *tolerance*, it does not necessarily connote these things (McLean, 1989, 32). Above all else, democracy, be it the direct or representative variant, is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political - legislative and administrative - decisions (Schumpeter, 1962, 242). This dissertation will argue that defining democracy as a political method provides a viable means by which to navigate the ambiguity imbued within Habermas's understanding of the

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function and character of the public sphere. Communication and deliberation within the public sphere are formed and swayed by instrumental concerns and ends: such activity is geared not towards the *transformation* of the concerns and interests of citizens, but rather towards the facilitation of the specific goals and ends that citizens - as both individuals and members of various groups within society - may desire. That is, democratic public spaces are not places in which citizens' interests are transformed, but instead serve as spaces in which these interests might be expressed and acted upon. To this end, their role is one of providing a space in which ideas and information are made ***public*** in the sense that they are placed before the citizenry - in turn, the citizenry can utilize this information as they desire in furtherance of their own goals and ends. Envisioning democracy as a public, instrumental process underscores the extent to which the character of the public sphere should be seen as being derived from and shaped by the institutions and practices that make up the state. These are the aspects of political practice that exert the greatest influence upon the constitution of the public sphere as well as the ebb and flow of public life.

In order to illustrate the manner in which Habermas's understanding of the public sphere is beset by ambivalence and how this vacillation might be circumvented, this dissertation will examine the Habermasian conceptualization of the role that the mass media are to play within democratic political practice. Habermas's account of the public sphere has been highly influential and widely embraced within the literature as a touchstone of the kind of ends that the media *should* be working towards(**2**). Taken as a whole, Habermas's concept of the public sphere provides a useful framework for investigating both the workings of the media in democracy and the ways in which media technologies are interwoven with other aspects of social organization and social change. In his use of the term ***public sphere***, Habermas designates both the emergent organization of the conditions of democratic debate as well as the role of the mass media within this context (Downing, 1988, 165). In this model, the media are implicated in the provision and

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maintenance of a process of deliberation in which the citizens can learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed, rational decisions about what to do. As Dahlgren puts it, the public sphere becomes a focal point of "our desire for the good society, the institutional sites where popular political will should take form and citizens should be able to constitute themselves as active agents in the political process (Dahlgren, 1991, 2)." It is within perceptions of the media, which Habermas identifies as the "public sphere's preeminent institution" (Habermas, 1989a, 181), that the conceptual tensions underlying the public sphere and democratic theory are best reflected. Habermas believes that the media ought to envisage themselves as the "mandatary of an enlightened public whose willingness to learn and capacity for criticism they at once presuppose, demand, and reinforce; like the judiciary, they ought to preserve their independence from political and social pressure; they ought to be receptive to the public's concerns and proposals, take up these issues and contributions impartially, augment criticisms, and confront the political process with articulate demands for legitimation (Habermas, 1996, 378)." It is by such means that Habermas conceives the media as establishing "all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of will and opinion on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state" and generating "a communicative power that cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it" (Habermas, 1992a, 446 & 452).

However, foregrounding of the media as the pivotal place for public discussion serves only to distort any understanding of the actual role played by the media in the democratic process. This dissertation will argue that properly fathoming the role of the media and the public sphere requires that both the democratic process within which they operate as well as the concomitant values attached to this system of representative government are understood in a relatively clear manner. In order to achieve this end, democracy should be viewed as an instrumental, public procedure of decision-making rather than as either a process of *transformation* for

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the interests and opinions of the citizenry or as a means by which to guarantee the existence of valued ideals such as *liberty* or *equality* (Elster, 1986). Moreover, doing so provides a means by which to arrive at a more suitable model for understanding and conceptualizing both the political role of the media and the character of the public sphere. The information, ideas and debate that are conveyed through the media and circulated through the public sphere do not exist as an end in themselves or *sui generis*. The shape and character of the public sphere and the media's role are formed in an important fashion by the nature of representative democratic practices and institutions. Likewise, political deliberation and communication within a democracy acquires its true value and only make sense in terms of the goals and ends of the various agents taking part in the political process, which are, in turn directed and shaped by the institutional configuration and procedures of the state. These institutions and practices designate different activities and roles to representatives and citizens which correspondingly entail different levels of information and involvement within the process of public deliberation.

Neither this aspect of representative democracy, nor its implications for the role of the media and the character of the public sphere, are acknowledged or examined by either Habermas or the literature inspired by his model. As a result of his universalistic conception of the public sphere, in that it stresses the public sphere's role in connecting the public, as a body, to the official state, Habermas's analysis of the public sphere glosses over the existence of different roles and realms of political action. The central problem with this vision of the public sphere lies in its failure to adequately conceptualize the inter-related, differentiated spheres of political action and communication that emerge as a result of the institutional matrix of representative democracy. Additionally, characterizing an *authentic* public sphere as one in which every citizen actively participates in a process of rational deliberation and will-formation, at both a practical as well as theoretical level, fails to take into account the reality of the institutional space within which the citizenry function.

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Both the institutions of state and the public sphere are enclosed within a legal framework that allows for public access and a relative degree of transparency. The institutional space of both the public sphere and representative government do not operate as if they were an extension of a face-to-face discussion, nor were they designed to function in such a fashion. In each instance, there exists a limited number of individuals who are active participants in any "deliberation" that may occur in either the realm of the state or the public sphere, while the remainder of the public act as spectators with a limited degree of contact and interaction with this first group. These categories of participants may well be overlapping ones (Mann, 1990, 88). But, within the arena of politics, representative democracies are not designed to allow for every individual to be an active participant nor do they require active participation from all the citizenry to work satisfactorily. Instead, the central act of political participation and communication that the representative democracies require of their citizenry is voting: Elections are the key act of and forum for citizen participation in a representative system. It is within this context that both the constitution of the public sphere and the role of the media need to be situated. By looking at the media in terms of the objectives that the Habermasian perspective attributes to them and, consequently, the kind of democratic order that they are to produce, this dissertation will reveal a slew of tensions and ambiguities that have not been given enough attention. Bringing these tensions into the light will suggest a more suitable model for understanding and conceptualizing both the political role of the media and the overall character of the public sphere.

A primary component of the Habermasian position is the belief that the media have a vital role in sustaining a public sphere and supporting and strengthening an open, free and democratic politics (Ward, 1995, 100). Nevertheless, above and beyond the possibility that the media can or will further democratic ideals, the more pertinent question concerns the kind of democratic ideals that they are to advance and instill. Moreover, in view of the media's straddling of the private/public divide,

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pledging the media to the service of particular set of ideals, democratic or otherwise, is a notion that needs to be assessed and studied. Indeed, there are a number of questions that can be raised about the manner in which the role of the media is theorized. For example, there is the fundamental question of whether or not the assumption that a given set of democratic ideals can be promoted or hindered by the actions and products of the media is, in itself, a reasonable expectation. In light of the substantial demands and obligations arising from its day-to-day operations, is the promotion of the *public interest* a realistic or topmost concern for the media? As opposed to the question of how the media contribute to or debilitate the public sphere, a more productive line of inquiry would start by asking what the term public sphere means or, more precisely, what exactly is it that the public sphere should be in a representative democracy? Furthermore, in supporting and strengthening an open, free and democratic politics, what should the media be doing and trying to accomplish? More importantly, what is this process of open, free and democratic politics trying to accomplish? Surprisingly, neither Habermas or those utilizing his conceptual framework give much in the way of critical consideration to the political values that the media are charged with securing and facilitating. As a result, the extent to which these expectations are possible or feasible goes unnoted. The degree to which such values may contribute to the atmosphere of ambivalence surrounding the media and the nature of the public sphere is similarly overlooked. As well, the overwhelming focus, by both Habermas and those inspired by his framework, upon whether the media do or do not sustain a healthy public sphere has resulted in a distorted picture of the public sphere in terms of the mechanisms by which formal and informal control is exercised by the citizenry. This dissertation will examine the question of whether these presumptions are realistic or appropriate to the procedures associated with the prevailing forms of representative government.

Underpinning the Habermasian critique of the media's current performance is the presumption that the media should serve the *public interest* or *general welfare*.

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Yet, at a meta-theoretical level, such a positioning of the media vis-a-vis both the private and public spheres is, in itself, problematic as well as a somewhat muddled proposition on which to base an explanation of the role of the media. Habermas's notion of the public sphere and the role of the media within it does not provide a clear answer to the question of the overall meta-theoretical position of the media-as-an-institution. Should the media be thought of as a political institution? If the media constitute a political institution, what kind of political institution are they? When all is said and done, the media exist as an equivocal institution that simultaneously straddles both the private and public spheres as well as existing simultaneously outside and inside of government. At bottom, the media are private organizations whose primary objective is the selling and purveying of goods rather than the sustaining of one or another "vision of democracy". Like any other commercial entity, the media attempt to peddle a product that matches the tastes of its customers. The resulting media-scape is not so much a reflection of the relative health of democracy, as it is an indication of the myriad appetites of the public for particular kinds of media *goods*. That being said, in both popular and academic circles, there is also a notion that the media have or should have a special kind of relationship with both the public and private spheres, above and beyond that held by other commercial producers. Such a view arises because of the perception and belief that the media play a key role in facilitating communication between and amongst politicians and the larger public. Indeed, the impression that the media can be held accountable for what they do, or fail to do, in terms of the wider and longer term benefit of society has frequently been invited by the media themselves (McQuail, 1994, 241 - 242). This is especially the case when the media claim, if not expect, some rights and privileges as the result of their exercising a significant public role. Some of the products purveyed by the media, like the information about local, national and international events and occurrences known as the "news", are sold to consumers on the basis of their providing "information" that individuals will need in order to make a variety of economic, social and political decisions. In addition to various forms of

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legal recognition, the media are also shaped by official sponsorship, numerous subsidies, and differing degrees of legal protection in most western democracies (Cook, 1998, 109)(3).

Framing a discussion of the political role of the media in terms of *the public sphere* has a number of advantages in terms of the framework that it provides for analysing both the workings of the media in democracy and the ways in which media technologies are interwoven with other aspects of social organization and social change. However, it also has a number of significant disadvantages in that it restricts attention to "non-governmental institutions when, once representative democracy of some sort is an accomplished fact, the shape, character and extent of the non-governmental institutions of the public sphere are directed to a significant degree by the nature of the state itself (Schudson, 1997, 313)." Institutions of the public sphere, like the media, certainly influence the character of traditional political institutions and practices, but they do not stand prior to or invariably opposed to state institutions. Within any democratic system, both governmental and non-governmental institutions serve a set of overriding political values and ideas that are essentially drawn from the same source. While their respective institutional prerogatives and interests may put slightly different interpretations on how such values are to be acted upon, the resulting struggle is one of definition rather than one of domination. The media do not autochthonously generate and shape political communication according to their own interest and precepts - though these do have a tangible influence on the manner in which the media convey and construct political messages. The media function in a political context - in most instances some form of representative democracy - in which communication about public issues takes place in a number of forums and in a variety of ways. The institutions of government, be they of a republican or parliamentary variety, are a central and commanding site for public deliberation on public issues. Thus, what needs to be acknowledged and recognized is the extent to which democracy, as both an ideal and

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an institutional structure, and the media mutually constitute one another. Any political role that the media are to have cannot be defined in opposition to or in isolation from the *de facto* structure of government, however it may be constituted. Far from clearing the air of ambivalence around the media as a political entity, an examination of them as the preeminent influence and factor in political communication only contributes to and compounds the aura of uncertainty.

Through an examination of these issues as they relate to the Habermasian argument about the role of the media, this dissertation will uncover and develop a more lucid model for understanding and conceptualizing both the political role of the media and the character of the public sphere. The public sphere should be understood as a *representational* space that permits citizens to have equal access to information, ideas and debate. The public sphere stands as a space in which contrasting opinions on the actions of and options for the government are presented before the public. Although the public sphere functions as a space of symbolic representation rather than that of dialogical interaction, it is nonetheless a space in which opinion is made ***public*** in that it is being espoused and voiced by people outside governmental circles. As opposed to seeing the media as an agent of *transformation*, within this conception the media is understood as primarily operating as a mechanism of ***publicity***: the media allow for a common access to information and opinion in spite of spatial/temporal factors that might separate the citizenry of a nation state. In doing this, the media furnish and maintain a *public* and shared context within which all political actors operate: the expanded, *mediated* form of public life organized and enjoined by the media presents the citizenry with numerous new contexts and environments within which politics can and does occur. However, such opportunities do not signify a substantive reworking, modification or diminution of the institutions and procedures of representative government. In their mediation of political communications, the workings of the media do not alter or otherwise impair the form or substance of the political process. Rather, their impact is upon the

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perception of this process and its *public face*. The fundamental nature and institutions of the system of representative government - frequent and regular electoral competition between potential representatives, relative independence of the decision-making of those who govern from the wishes of their electorate, freedom of expression of opinion and political views amongst those who are governed, public decisions undergoing the trial of debate, etc. (Manin, 1997, 6) - remains intact: any transformations that may transpire are ones of degree rather than ones of substance.

Correctly grasping the political role of the media demands that one do more than simply assess the degree to which it has or can have an impact and influence upon the procedures of democracy. An active reasoned public discussion about the common good is seen to define the essence of democracy: in very general terms a democracy is an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members (Cohen, 1989, 17). As both a description and term of analysis, democracy refers to the realization of something approaching self-government, and on the other hand it refers to the particular institutional arrangements that are believed to bring about this state of affairs. Even the most cursory of glances at the literature on democracy and democratic theory reveals that concurrence on the advantageousness of the first aspect does not necessarily result in agreement on what is involved in the second. That is, while the concept of democracy remains the ideal to which all democratic *theorists* pledge themselves they frequently differ on the means by which this ideal is to be realized in a sustainable institutional form. Consequently, there is a deep-seated tension within democratic theory about whether this process of public deliberation should be something that the public is directly involved and participating within or something undertaken by individuals to whom the public, through some form of election, has delegated this duty: it is an uncertainty about whether democracy should mean some kind of popular power (a form of politics in which citizens are directly engaged in self-government and self-regulation) or an aid to decision-making (a means of conferring authority and legitimacy on those

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periodically elected into office) (Held, 1993, 15). This dissension results in two very basic, yet dissimilar, models: direct and representative democracy. The first model consists of a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved and responsible. Examples of the former model, known as either direct or participatory democracy, are found in the Athenian *agora* or New England town halls. Traditionally, it was thought that a republic or democracy had to be small enough in size, in terms of population and geographic territory, so as to facilitate realistic and rational control by the citizenry(4). However, the likelihood of realistically achieving such a form of deliberation in large complex nation states with millions of citizens is generally conceded to be next to impossible.

The general tendency has been to adapt democratic practice through the introduction of a variety of representative structures: political parties, elected representatives and full-time bureaucratic apparatuses. This adaptation, known as liberal or representative democracy, is the second model to emerge from the above-mentioned dissension. In very general terms, it is a system of rule in which a group of elected "officers" undertake to "represent" the interests or views of citizens within the framework of a "rule of law" (Held, 1993, 15). The manner in which representative democracy has manifested itself in terms of institutions and procedures has been quite varied. However, in very general terms, it is usually thought of as including "elected government; free and fair elections in which every citizen's vote has an equal weight; a suffrage which embraces all citizens irrespective of distinctions of race, religion, class, sex and so on; freedom of conscience, information and expression on all public matters broadly defined; the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office; and associational autonomy - the right to form independent associations including social movements, interest groups and political parties (***Ibid.***)." For advocates of direct democracy such a manoeuver has always been viewed as suspect and as an abjuration of authentic democratic expression and practice. However, whatever the alienation and peril

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involved in their operation, the establishment of representative structures of government offer, as Nicholas Garnham notes, "a liberating gain rather than any sort of loss of supposed preexisting authenticity (Garnham, 1992, 366)." Representative democracy allows for accountable and feasible government, potentially stable over large geographic territories and time spans (Dahl, 1989).

While representative democracy has emerged as the dominant model in terms of practical politics, direct democracy has nonetheless retained a persevering normative allure and robustness in theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, whichever model is under consideration, democracy remains, and should be understood as, an instrumental, public process of decision-making. More often than not, disputes between advocates of the direct and representative models about the *meaning* of democracy are really disputes about how much democracy is either desirable or practicable; their focus is upon questions of where the trade-off should come between democratic and other values, or at what point a given set of institutional arrangements for realizing the principle of control by equal citizens is in practice sustainable (Beetham, 1993, 55). In this regard, the main bone of contention in the literature concerns the question of whether or not the input/control that, theoretically or practically, the citizenry exercise on the decision-making process in current circumstances is commensurate with the *ideal* of self-rule that is seen as being fundamental to the conception of democracy.

This dissertation will explore the manner in which this equivocacy plays itself out in the Habermasian discussion of the media, democracy and the public sphere. The argument will consist of six chapters. The first three chapters will focus upon and review the sense of ambivalence that surrounds the democratic expectations placed in the media. To this end, particular attention will be paid to the core set of principles that are espoused in analyses of what the media, as a political entity, should do. In spite of the importance that Habermas attributes to the media in

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providing a space for public dialogue, there is an underlying uncertainty in the general literature about the media's role in and impact on democratic politics. The evaluation of these arguments will begin in the second chapter with an outline of those duties commonly attributed to the media. In the third chapter, the standard criticisms levied against the media in terms of their ability to engender and support the breadth and depth of deliberation suitable to the needs of a democratic citizenry will be reviewed and examined. Finally, in the fourth chapter attention will be redirected towards the democratic duties attributed to the media. In particular, a close inspection of the duties assigned to the media by nineteenth century assertions that the "press" functions as the *fourth* estate reveals that these responsibilities are fraught with ambivalence and contradiction. Furthermore, the confusion as to whether the media are the reflectors or sources of public debate also leads to some vagueness in how the relationship between the media, the public and democracy is constructed.

The fifth chapter will undertake an examination of notions of deliberation and democracy especially as they relate to the media. Specifically, the discussion of the fifth chapter will scrutinize the image of democracy as a process of deliberation and debate amongst citizenry that the media are enlisted into maintaining and perpetuating as articulated by Habermas in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Habermas's account of the public sphere has been highly influential and widely embraced by a number of observers as a touchstone of the kind of ends which the media *should* be working towards (although these observers frequently suggest various ways in which Habermas's framework might be improved - see various essays in Calhoun, 1992 & Robbins, 1993; as well as works such as Curran, 1991a & 1991b; Dahlgren, 1995; Garnham, 1986; Hallin, 1994; Keane, 1984; Landes, 1988; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; Peters, 1993; Thompson, 1990 & 1995) . A central element of Habermas's work is that embodied in the notion of the bourgeois public sphere are certain ideas and principles which still retain their

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relevance despite the developments and changes in public life since the nineteenth century. Paramount amongst these ideas is what Habermas sometimes refers to as the *critical principle of publicity*. For Habermas, and others, this idea functions as a yardstick by which existing institutions, such as the media, and their practices might be measured and assessed. An evaluation of the principal points made by Habermas will reveal a number of underlying problems with the vision of deliberation and democratic politics that this model offers. Particular attention will be paid to the latent suppositions within Habermas's narrative of a "transformation" in the "rational-critical" nature of the public sphere and how they drive his theoretical conclusions and prescriptions about the standards that democratic deliberation must meet. Of specific concern is Habermas's seemingly uncritical reification of the bourgeois public sphere's suspicion of state/government power and action into a structuring principle for his general theory. By the same token, how exactly is the *public sphere* to stand in relation to other formal and informal mechanisms of government? Is the public sphere the only space where negotiation between the established power of the state and the citizenry takes place? Answering these questions will demonstrate that the overwhelming focus in the Habermasian literature upon whether the media do or do not sustain a healthy public sphere has generated a distorted picture of the public sphere in terms of the mechanisms by which formal and informal control is exercised by the citizenry. Lastly, in light of the institutional structure of representative government does Habermas's model of the *public sphere* offer an appropriate vision of politics? To think of the media as part and parcel of a public sphere in which a "conversation" is carried out among equals introduces a considerable degree of ambiguity into any understanding of the political role and function of the media. A conception of the media as an instrument of extended face-to-face dialogue attempts to map the normative substance and goals of direct democratic practice onto structures that are primarily representational in form and content.

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The sixth chapter will examine the manner in which notions of citizenship are constructed and utilized in the pertinent literature's discussions about the media's interaction with the political process. From its earliest incarnation in arguments for and about the "liberty of the press", a central duty for the media has involved the creation and investiture of the public as a specific kind of political entity. To this end, theories about the media and democracy have been, at one level, attempts to integrate mass participation into the process of decision-making without undermining the overriding principle of rationality. Accordingly, the place of the public in democratic theory is that of being the central rhetorical figure, rather than a specifically social referent, in a politics based upon an appeal to rational consensus. As a political invention, the public or citizenry is the entity that grounds both the practice of politics and the aspirations of its communication systems. The significance of the *public*, as a concept, lies not in its designation as a social grouping but rather in its denotation of a political space whose authority does not rely upon force, tradition or the weight of privilege for its legitimacy.

While many aspects of the *publicness* of the public space or sphere have been examined, the core entity, the public itself, has been left in the shadows and ofttimes excluded from direct consideration. Within the Habermasian framework, the overriding concern is that the media *should* construct a role for the citizen that emphasizes and features qualities and properties suitable to the needs of democracy. Yet this vision of the public-as-citizens is part and parcel of the seldom examined and tension fraught ideal of democracy that underpins the Habermasian discourse about the media and politics. The sixth chapter will illuminate the extent to which these prescriptions for the role of the media stem from an ongoing apprehension about both the political competence of the public and the consequent impact of their involvement in the political process. This anxiety over the democratic sufficiency of the public only serves to distort the understanding of what healthy democratic citizenship should entail as well as the corresponding function and role of the media

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in contemporary circumstances. The ignorance or intelligence of the public in regards to its political participation and competency is a conceptual cul-de-sac that fails to clarify or shed any light upon the role of the public in a democracy. In light of the division of labour brought about by the institutions of representative government why does the public need to be of such an active and participatory variety? Habermas's distorted image of the necessary requirements of/for effective democratic citizenship has led to an equally misdirected conception of the proper role and functioning of the media. A more basic and pertinent question needs to be asked about the public in its relationship with both democracy and the media: does the democratic theory most relevant to the politics and institutions of representative government require the kind of rational/deliberative citizenry so often attributed to it? Through an examination of that part of the so-called *classical* democratic theory pertinent to the institutions and practice of representative government, this chapter will demonstrate that such expectations about the requirements of citizenship are entirely unwarranted and ultimately unnecessary. Instead, this chapter will show that a more apposite and productive focus centres on the kind of role that the institutions and processes of representative government require and create for the citizenry.

An understanding of the kind of role that the institutional structure expects from its citizenry will, in turn, lead to a clearer conception of the type of role that media ***can*** and ***should*** play. The seventh chapter will examine and elaborate upon two interrelated themes that have been an integral part of the preceding discussion. First, it will review and consider the apparent ambivalent impact of the media on the political process in regards to its consequence(s) for the theoretical focus and conceptual direction of Habermas's understanding. Foregrounding the media as the pivotal place for and of public discussion serves to only distort and over-extend any assessment of the actual role played by the media in the democratic process. Too exclusive a concentration upon the media as an institution of the public sphere potentially overlooks the degree to which both the information conveyed and role

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played by the media has been shaped and moulded by the presence and workings of other governmental and non-governmental institutions. Secondly, it will also analyse the extent to which the Habermasian position misreads and misconstrues the institutions and objectives of representative democracy in terms of being a suitable manifestation of democratic government as the "rule of the people". Within this body of literature, the overriding concern is that the media *should* construct a role for the citizen that emphasizes and features those qualities and properties thought suitable to the needs of democracy. However, the role of the ordinary citizen is fashioned more by the procedures and institutions of the political process than by the workings and products of the media. If the role of the media is to be adequately ascertained it is necessary that the democratic process and institutions within which they operate are also understood. In general, the principles that animate the media have been inadequately conceptualized: as well there has been some confusion over what principles do motivate the media versus what ones ***should*** inspire it. Review of these two points will allow for the development of an understanding of the media and their role that properly situates them within the context of the institutional matrix of representative government. Such a positioning suggests that the central role of the media, instead of being one of "transformation" or rational-critical deliberation, is best conceived of in terms of *publicity*: the media's role is that of making both information and opinion *public* and accessible to all.

Implicit within the idea of democracy is the notion that all citizens, no matter what their socio-economic standing, are capable of and entitled to contribute and participate in the decision-making process, thus enabling them to influence the framework which generates and limits the conditions of their own lives (Held, 1996, especially 263 - 273). Indeed, the assumption that citizens are capable of ruling themselves is contained within the very language of democracy. Without the idea of rational autonomy the idea of self-governance lapses into contradiction and becomes, as its elitist critics have always insisted, a rationalization for the rule of prejudice -

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force legitimized by numbers (Barber, 1993, 66). The central challenge is a matter of establishing the institutional means through which the people can rationally participate in political discussion and decision making. In this light, it must be remembered that democracy is chiefly about majority rule. Albeit a majority rule that needs to be tempered by the opportunity for informed discussion on the part of all levels of decision-making. However, if the boundaries of this concept are pushed too far it begins to become theoretically ineffectual. A democracy may or may not facilitate *liberty* or *equality* or *tolerance*, but it does not necessarily connote such things (McLean, 1989, 32). Above all else, democracy is "a political method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political - legislative and administrative - decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical conditions. And this must be the starting point of any attempt at defining it (Schumpeter, 1962, 242)." In examining the political role and function of the media, this is a fact that would be well kept in mind. A realistic political role for the media should not be defined in relation to some abstract idea of democracy and public opinion, but rather in contrast with its concrete political institutions and practices. Developing such a perspective will, in turn, suggest a way in which to envision the character of the public sphere that sidesteps the ambiguity present in the Habermasian conception.

Endnotes

1. Since the publication of 1989 translation there has been a great deal of Anglo-American literature engaging and extending the model presented by Habermas. For examples of both see various essays in Calhoun, 1992 & Robbins, 1993; as well as works such as Curran, 1991a & 1991b; Dahlgren, 1995; Garnham, 1986; Hallin, 1994; Keane, 1984; Landes, 1988; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; Peters, 1993; Thompson, 1990 & 1995. One point frequently noted within this literature is the considerable degree of resonance between Habermas's formulation and that of John Dewey (1927) and Hannah Arendt (1958) - whose account Habermas draws upon in outlining the differing historical meanings of *private* and *public*. Although all three work from different traditions and vary in the approach that they take, there are some

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interesting parallels in their respective conceptualizations. An interesting comparison between the three thinkers in regards to the issue of citizenship can be found in Alejandro (1993). A comparison of the similarities (and differences) between Habermas and Arendt can also be found in Cohen & Arato's (1992) discussion of the concept of *civil society*.

2. For the purpose of this study the terms "media" and "mass media" will be understood as referring to the full range of communications media dedicated to the exchange of opinion. Mass media are a rapidly expanding category that - at a minimum - includes newspapers, magazines, television or radio (Salmon & Glasser, 1995, 453, n. 8). While the designation "mass media" is, as Kenneth Minogue remarked, "an unpleasing and misleading neologism" (Minogue, 1989, 475), it does serve to give more matter though less art by providing an useful, if slightly encumbered, expository term. With such considerations in mind, this dissertation will, for the sake of convenience, use the words interchangeably while, consciously and without malicious intent, dodging the thorny issues of etymology and semantic exactitude.

3. Although Cook makes this point in regard to the specific historical circumstances of the American case, its general import can be extended and applied to other western democracies.

4. For a discussion of the history and issues involved in the relationship between size and democracy see Dahl & Tufte, 1973, especially pp. 4 - 16.

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Chapter Two:

The Duties and Responsibilities of the Media

> *The Administration of Government is nothing else, but the Attendance of the Trustees of the People upon the Interest and Affairs of the People. And as it is the Part and Business of the People, for whose Sake alone all publick Matters are, or ought to be, transacted, to see whether they be well or ill transacted; for it is the Interest, and ought to be the Ambition, of the honest Magistrates, to have their Deeds openly examined, and publickly scanned: Only the wicked Governors of Men dread what is said of them. ... Freedom of Speech is ever the Symptom, as well as the effect of good Government.*
>
> John Trenchard & Thomas Gordon, "Of Freedom of Speech"

In the past twenty-five years, the remarkably rapid extension and expansion in the productive and circulatory capability of communications technology has enabled the mass media to present an ever widening spectrum of events in a relatively instantaneous fashion. The introduction and precipitous dispersal of personal computers, videocassette recorders, cable, satellites, electronic mail, telephone networks as well as the evolution of fibre optic technology have changed the ways in which information is transmitted and received by both media and public alike. These new technologies are seen to be furnishing new ways of accessing information, communicating with other people, and plugging into the pleasures of a new computer-mediated public sphere (Kellner, 1995, 16).

The political implications entailed by the arrival and diffusion of these various communication technologies have been noted in a wide-ranging and ever-growing body of literature (For a sample of the discourse and issues involved see Abramson et al, 1988; Alger, 1996; Arterton, 1987; Barber, 1998; Friedland, 1996; Grossman, 1995; Mclean, 1989; Neuman, 1991; Pool, 1983; Sclove, 1995; Tehranian, 1990; Wheeler, 1997 - especially chapter 8). However, these discussions

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are merely the most recent installments in an already voluminous store of knowledge and disputation. While these new communications technologies are quite distinctive in most regards, the debate about their likely influence and consequence draws upon polemics and arguments which were first invoked in regard to the political potential and function of newspapers, radio or television. Whatever the manifest exterior aspect of the medium, analysis of the political function(s) of the media is driven by a core set of principles that has persevered through each stage of technical metamorphosis and innovation. Although some of the accoutrements are new, this year's model is very similar, in spirit and outlook if not in style and substance, to the previous year's version.

In spite of the numerous changes in the mass media's technological form and capacity, scrutiny has overwhelmingly tended to focus upon the extent to which the media assist or hinder the public interest. Both the analysis and ensuing account of the media's role are heavily influenced by a larger narrative of systemic dysfunction in political communication. In light of the current malaise the central problem is seen to be the failure of the media to perform in a manner which aids and abets a healthy, rational democratic practice. Given this outlook, the key theoretical task is seen to be the identification and removal of those obstacles believed to be hindering the realization of democratic norms. That is, attention is focussed upon identifying those factors that are seemingly preventing the public from having a rational, articulate voice in public affairs as well as trying to envisage the means by which this kind of expression can be promptly restored or reconstructed. In such an endeavour, investigators can draw upon a long history of vibrant argumentation about the proper role and function of the media in a democracy. These arguments have provided much in the way of inspiration for the Habermasian literature. However, in the case of Habermas and those inspired by his model, their implicit assumptions about both democracy and the role of the press, as well as their conceptual substance, are seldom examined or elaborated in any detail. As a consequence, their resultant project

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becomes an attempt to invigorate and modernize a conception of the role of the media that had previously explained, motivated and supported cherished democratic values.

Although far from uniform, conventional accounts of and arguments about the proper democratic role of the media tend to stress a relatively similar set of assumptions and beliefs about the function of the media and why this function is necessary. Through successive economic, social, political and technological changes the role of the media is still generally thought of as a means by which ideas circulate, by which individuals receive arguments and are influenced by them, and by which facts about current issues are disseminated (Smith, 1973, 112). Despite differences of emphasis and tone, most accounts, popular or scholastic, implicate the media in a process whereby they create a space where all citizens, whatever their status, can participate in deliberation about their common affairs in an open, rational manner (Fraser, 1992, 110). This chapter will begin the evaluation of these arguments by outlining the general literature's prevailing sense of uncertainty and equivocation about the performance and potential of the media in fulfilling democratic expectations. This will be followed by a review of the political responsibilities and duties commonly attributed to the media.

A persistent thread in the literature dealing with the political role of the media is the impression that the mass media function, at best, as instruments of mixed potential and consequence for the realm of politics. Even amidst the celebration of the teeming capability and promise of the "digital revolution" in media technology, one will often detect an underlying tone of apprehension and caution that undercuts, if not deflates, much of the exoteric zealotry(1). While various new media and computer technologies fuel the dream of instituting some form of direct and interactive communication between spatially dispersed senders and receivers, they also inspire a considerable sense of dread about the possibility that dysfunctional

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effects might occur as well, albeit inadvertently. As much as contemporary telecommunications and information technologies are thought to be capable of enhancing democratic self-governance (through electronically mediated political processes such as instant voting or opinion polling) there is also a fear that they might, in the name of democracy, pervert political discourse or bring about some form of elite domination or mobocracy (Sclove, 1995, 135 - 136). In the literature, technological changes are positioned as harboring the means either to promote or retard the empowerment of the citizenry (Wheeler, 1997, 243).

The perception of "media" contrariety is not the exclusive possession of "digital" technology, but has been a constant feature in each successive stage of "evolution" in media technology. It has become almost passé to speak of each successive development in media and communications and their emergent form as constituting a revolution of some sorts in both technological and phenomenological terms. Television, telecommunications or computers have all been spoken about in tones which intimate that their emergence is, in each specific instance, a cataclysmic, radical break with the past which fundamentally alters human experience and perception of the world. Yet, just as often, this quasi-utopian exuberance is tempered by an underlying anxiety about how the particular "revolutionary" breakthrough in communications technology might produce dystopian outcomes for both public and political life. A most conspicuous illustration of this is provided in the case of television where, more often than not, both commendation and condemnation are expressed, ofttimes in parallel. For example, when supporting the congressional bill that established public television President Lyndon Johnson praised television's potential to "make our nation a replica of the old Greek marketplace, where public affairs took place in view of all the citizens." Yet, he went on to express the concern that "in weak or even in irresponsible hands, it could generate controversy without understanding; it could mislead as well as teach; it could appeal to passions rather than reason (*as quoted in* Aufderheide, 1991, 174)." In point of fact, this way of

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viewing the character of the media predates the emergence of either radio or television broadcasting. Much of the framework of "mixed blessings" also appears more or less fully formed in discussions of the newspaper press. For example, John Stuart Mill envisioned newspapers as the equivalent to the Pnyx and the Forum in terms of their ability to allow for both the formation and propagation of opinion across great physical distances (Mill, 1972b, 193). Yet, in discussing the manner in which they actually worked, Mill viewed newspapers as vehicles of conformity in which the thinking of the people was done for them - a characteristic that he saw as having the potential of undermining the utility and purpose of open debate (Mill, 1972a, 134). Likewise, Thomas Jefferson can be cited as either a effusive supporter or vehement critic of the role that newspapers can play in the workings of government and public life. Whether in the form of the printed page or some electronic medium, extolment of the emancipatory potential of the media has always been leavened by a considerable degree of alarm and suspicion about the possibility of adverse outcomes. In spite of the technical sophistication of contemporary communications technology, the feeling of apprehension about the media's ability to insure and provide the quality of discussion and quantity of participation thought necessary for a thriving and salutary democratic public sphere has not been diminished.

Steadfast through successive assessments of the media's ability and performance in meeting a variety of democratic expectations, is the belief that the articulation of rational, critical public opinion through the media is a vital, if not constituent, feature of modern democracy. This is an aspect that features heavily in the discussion of Habermas and those inspired by his model. The concrete and theoretical existence of an "institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" is seen to remain indispensable to both a critical social theory and democratic political practice (Fraser, 1992, 111). This notion of a *public sphere* is a central building block in discussions of democratic theory and practice and normative press theory:

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it is an idea that designates an institutional space that mediates between the state and civil society. The precise manner in which this mediation is actualized, however, is a point on which observers have disagreed. For some, it is enough that information, conveyed through channels of communication such as the media, is made commonly accessible and available to the public. For others, like Habermas, the notion of the public sphere specifically designates an interactive theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of conversation (Fraser, 1992, 110). Lying underneath Habermasian discussions of the media and politics is a vision of democracy as an institutional framework that allows individuals-as-citizens to determine the ends and goals of their society by reasoning together. Whatever potential various observers see this conception of democracy as having, "it has because democracy is a good way of responding to and organizing politics (Warren, 1996, 244)." It is a process in which the answer to a very basic question - what is to be done? - is generated by deliberative and discursive means rather than being based on force, coercion and/or the weight of tradition and privilege. Needless to say, such deliberation requires equal and unrestricted access to "arenas in which citizens can propose issues for the political agenda and participate in debate about those issues (Cohen, 1989, 31)."

With the political and cultural significance of traditional and localized arenas receding in the aftermath of social change and developments in communications technology, the media has come to acquire an important, if not dominant, role in providing a site for the expression and formation of popular political will (Dahlgren, 1991, 1). In this process, mass media are believed to be one of the central means through which society as a whole could open a dialogue about itself and decide in a public way the direction of public life (Hallin, 1985, 121). This is by no means the only function that the press actually fulfil, but it is judged the most important, and it is with reference to this role that they are celebrated or criticized. As such, they serve as an important catalyst for forms of collective political action thought essential to

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the perpetuation of an active public life under conditions of mass democracy (Hallin, 1985, 127). Moreover, it is due to the unexamined acceptance of a linkage between the media and an active public life that Habermasian conceptions of the relationship between the media and democracy are infused with a sense of ambivalence.

At the meta-theoretical level, the linking of the media and the relative vitality of collective political action has had a significant impact upon the overall perspective, orientation and direction taken by the Habermasian literature. That is, at the level of both observation and analysis, the linkage between media and public life has led to an overwhelming emphasis upon the place and influence of the media in and on the workings of both public and political life. In such a theoretical construction, the centrality of the media's position is taken for granted and attention focusses upon the kind of impact, good or bad, that the media has or can have on public life. For example, the quality of the democratic life to be found in the public sphere is often seen to be dependent upon the character and kind of debate and discussion which occurs within the media: "The health of democracy in the course of the twentieth century has more and more been linked to the health of systems of communication, though of course democracy cannot be reduced to issues of the media. However, the dynamics of democracy are intimately linked to the practices of communication, and societal communication increasingly takes place within the mass media (Dahlgren, 1995, 2)." Similarly, there is a considerable body of literature that chronicles the various ways in which the media fall short of being an ideal forum for the formation and propagation of public opinion. Although mainly critical in its disposition, the key aspect of this literature seized upon by the Habermasian stance is its theoretical placement of the media as the pre-eminent institution of public and political discourse. It is against this perceived position of theoretical and practical importance that the performance of the media is measured, criticized and judged. In this regard, the subsequent judgement has been largely negative and disparaging of the overall impact of the media on public and political life. For whatever its other

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merits, twentieth century democracy has nowhere realized what proponents and opponents alike have thought to be an essential feature, namely the active and informed participation of a politically competent citizenry (Simonds, 1989, 182). In spite of the link to political life provided by the media, numerous polls have demonstrated that many citizens remain profoundly ignorant of even the most rudimentary political information (Arterton, 1987, 16). As well, in the last twenty years the rate of voter participation in most western democratic states has declined. While assessments of the extent and degree of this failure are subject to considerable variation and differing emphasis, blame for the marked deterioration of public life is frequently attributed to the performance of the media. Chiefly, criticism is levelled at the manner in which the media provides information and debate: "Information that is fragmented, isolated from context, detached from ordering concepts, discontinuous, and abstracted from any reference to historical process is information that undermines the ability to understand. The result is an information environment in which the capacity of the *demos* for competent and effective political action is diminished rather than enhanced (Simonds, 1989, 206)." The upshot of this informational environment is thought to be a set of circumstances in which democratic citizenship is effectively eviscerated and the continuance of democracy thrown into severe doubt.

In light of these criticisms, the common conclusion reached is that the *public sphere* is in a degenerate condition and that the vitality of democratic practice is seriously threatened if not mortally imperiled (Rodger, 1985, 203). The ostensible gap between the theoretical expectations and democratically dysfunctional effects of the media has prompted one set of observers to ask: "are we able to believe even in the *possibility* of a role for mass communication in the furtherance of democratic ideals (Ettema & Glasser, 1994, 5)?" Yet, a belief, however faltering at times, in the ability of a properly constituted and focussed media to fulfil such a role continues to persist alongside the equally prevalent sense of despair. To this end, a number of

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suggestions have been proposed as means of reversing the deficient performance of the media in their democratic tasks as well as strengthening the reasoned discussion of ideas and policies. A considerable quantity of these proposals involve measures aimed at fostering a "skilled and thoughtful journalism" that would make "a vital contribution to the quality of democratic discourse" (Spragens, 1990, 206; see also Anderson et al, 1994; Hackett & Zhao, 1998; Rosen, 1991 & 1996). Others have seen the renewal of the public life to lie in some type of alteration to the patterns of ownership underlying the media. In this instance, a common conviction is that the gradual consolidation of media resources within fewer and fewer hands should be prevented. The corporate concentration of media resources is believed to not only threaten the individual *qua* consumer, but also threaten the individual *qua* citizen (Thompson, 1990, 262).

These prescriptions for curing the media are generally, and genuinely, offered without a discernable awareness of the strange homeopathy being suggested. As discussed previously, the mass media are seen to be one of the contributing causes to the decay of democratic practice and discourse. Notwithstanding this perceived state of affairs, it is simultaneously professed that the revitalization of the public sphere lies in the introduction of a more socially responsible mass media into democratic politics. That is, the cure for the dysfunctional effect of the media on democracy, is more media - albeit media that is more aware of and responsive to their position of influence(2). As such, mass media can be readily likened to a form of radiation where the question of type, dosage and exposure are seen to be critical as to whether the treatment heals or destroys. Even in its present dysfunctional form, the power and potential of the media emerges as one of ambivalence. The very aspects of the media which inspire quasi-utopian eulogies about their democratic effects and benefits, also, paradoxically, elicit equally fervid denunciations of the media as the great Satan debasing and possibly perverting the practice of democracy. As often as a curse is levied on the influence of the media, hope is held out that,

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under the right conditions, the higher potential of the media might be cultivated. In looking at the Habermasian literature one notes that the media and politics have a curious and ambiguous love-hate relation where perspective and judgement are always shifting at any given moment: the utilization and appropriation of the technology of mass communications, to all appearances, simultaneously enriches and impoverishes democratic politics. Nevertheless, in spite of the aura of ambivalence, a belief in the "*possibility* of a role for mass communication in the furtherance of democratic ideals" persists and endures.

Although technological innovation generally results in an expansion of the number of choices available to individuals, it also, in many respects, displaces or drives out previous possibilities(**3**). For instance, the widespread dissemination of the telephone is seen as a primary factor in the general decline of practices of civilized correspondence like letter writing (Galston, 1993, 250). In the case of the media, the general ubiquity of television and related screen-based technologies is thought to have diminished the power and prevalence of other forms of political communication. It is believed that the ascendance of television as the primary source of information and dominant template of current political communication means "nothing less than the replacement of words with images, of the ability to concentrate with the desire for quick hits, of the awareness of logical and causal relations with the craving for jump cuts (***Ibid.***)." The underlying tendencies of a predominantly ocular vehicle like television are thought to be a source of constant tension for the conveyance of information (Galston, 1993, 251). While far from ideal in many ways, newspapers were believed to facilitate those attributes of public deliberation most valued by political republicanism: as impersonal, in that circulating newspapers detached arguments from any specific individual with their particular vested interests and social attachments; as rational, the printing of reasoned arguments divested them of the rhetorical power of the human voice; as universalistic, newspapers circulated among all citizens without regard to their status or wealth, allowing them the

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possibility of private reflection upon public issues and their responses (Kaplan, 1997, 333). As a primarily visual medium, television is believed to alter the dynamics of public deliberation in terms of the type and quality of information and debate that prevails. Television is seen to be primarily a medium of *entertainment*. Neil Postman argues that the supra-ideology of all discourse on television is entertainment: the overarching presumption is that what is being presented to the audience is there for their amusement (Postman, 1985, 87). Due to this, the quality and quantity of information and discussion of public affairs is thought to be wanting and far below the standard necessary for facilitating the effective, rational participation by individuals in the democratic process.

The air of uncertainty and equivocation about the performance and potential of the media in fulfilling democratic expectations has been noted regularly in the literature (Carey, 1989a; Dahlgren, 1995; Habermas, 1987; Hoynes, 1994). For some, the source of this tension is attributable to the mismatch between the "forms of communication that are normative for democratic ideas of public opinion - dialogue, interaction, critical consensus, and informed participation" and the "forms of communication that prevail in a vast modern nation-state" (Peters, 1995, 3). For others, the tension stems from the conflicting obligations placed on the media as an economic or *private* entity versus the expectations placed upon it as a political or *public* entity (Garnham, 1986; Keane, 1991). Whatever the case, the source of this ambivalence is usually thought to lie within the domain of the media's operation. That being said, there have been few attempts, if any, to look beyond the performance of the media for other possible sources of this uncertainty.

The absence of any detailed speculation about other possible sources for the ambiguity in discourse about the media, beyond those involved in the operation and functioning of the media, is a product of the manner in which the entire debate is framed. All too often, discussions concerning the role of the media in democracy

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operate as if in a vacuum, "as if all democracy required were that the press transmit the best possible information from the expert journalists who can judge it to the masses of readers who can make use of it (Schudson, 1995, 26)." Moreover, continuing along this same line of speculation, if this supply of "high-quality information" is reduced or otherwise interfered with, then individuals are seen as being effectively disenfranchised as well as being made all the more susceptible to the siren call of political apathy, if not barbarism (Connell, 1991, 237). As a result of this all too constricted focus, the mechanism of the media's proper functioning is vigorously questioned and contested, while the understanding and definition of the role that they are supposed to play is generally accepted without query or detailed investigation. To all appearances, this is not too surprising a situation. The basic assumptions which underpin the discussion of media-in-politics are so familiar and generally accepted, albeit with some variation in formulation, as to almost eliminate the need for critical reiteration(4). For example, near the beginning of an essay entitled "The Media and the Public Sphere", Nicholas Garnham states: "It is a commonplace to assert that public communication lies at the heart of the democratic process; that citizens require, if their equal access to the vote is to have any substantive meaning, equal access also to sources of information and equal opportunities to participate in debates from which political decisions rightly flow (Garnham, 1986, 37)." Though the assertion of the centrality of public communication to the democratic process may be something of a platitude, it still begs the question "why?" Given its assumptions about the role of the citizenry in terms of their involvement in the process of public decision-making, the need to ask such a question of the Habermasian discourse about the public sphere and the political role of the media is especially necessary. It will be the aim of this dissertation to conduct a critical examination of the half-hidden premises, unexplored assumptions and unacknowledged antecedents that hang on the skirts of Habermasian discussions of the relationship between the media, the public sphere, democracy and the larger body politic. To better understand the way in which these assumptions

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shape the discourse about the media's political role and to assess their implications, it is first necessary to review the political responsibilities and duties commonly attributed and assigned to the media.

The place of the mass media in the political process is often described in a manner that ascribes them a fundamental, if not critical, role. Such imputation of significance is especially pronounced in discussions of the relationship between the media and democracy, where the media are oft described as "important mechanisms in ensuing the principles of modern democratic societies (Wheeler, 1997, 1)." Moreover, the importance of the political role of the media has been depicted as one that has gradually evolved over time. The role of the media has changed from being simply dependent on the political process through reporting on and about it, to that of "being an *active participant in*, shaping influence upon, indeed an integral part of, the political process (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 3 - *emphasis* in original)." Furthermore, the substantial weight attached to the media's role is additionally enhanced by the tremendous dependence that individuals have upon impersonal sources of information for knowledge of matters beyond their direct personal experience, a domain into which most aspects of the political process fall. From the beginning the media, in the form of newspapers, were seen as a key institution in the emerging public sphere (Habermas, 1989a, 181). Besides allowing policy experts to communicate with each other, newspapers and subsequent media also gathered together, interpreted, debated, and disseminated information and ideas about public policy in a form that was accessible to the larger audience of ordinary citizens (Page, 1995, 5). With the advent of radio and television, both the technological complexion and socio-economic organization of communications media became more sophisticated and large-scale: the media became mass media. Yet, the perceived central position of the media within the public sphere - whatever their form or configuration - remained intact: "Today, newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere (Habermas, 1974, 136)." As the "press"

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expanded to include diverse forms such as radio and television, the rhetoric and demands associated with the media and their democratic role were likewise tailored to correspond with the capabilities of the then-emergent form. However, such modifications did not exclude or preclude the expectations voiced with earlier forms. Indeed, more often than not, the claims made on behalf of radio or television closely echoed the claims made on behalf of the newspaper(5).

While flights of eloquence have waxed and waned, appraisals of the media's importance in both the process of public discussion and the overall democratic project have not been informed by a sense of restraint. Not too long ago, for example, two commentators declared that journalism is the most important form of public knowledge (Hackett & Zhao, 1998, 1). If it is anything at all, such effervescence is one of the more pronounced and durable traditions within the literature. For example, in 1855 Henry Reeve believed that the influence of the newspaper press had achieved a stature that is "scarcely possible to exaggerate. Journalism is now truly an estate of the realm; more powerful than any of the other estates; more powerful than all of them combined if it could ever be brought to act as a united and concentrated whole. ... Not only does it supply the nation with nearly all the information on public topics which it possesses, but it supplies it with its notions and opinions in addition (Reeve, 1855, 477)." Just over thirty years later, W. T. Stead expressed a comparable outlook about the role played by the newspaper press: "The Press is at once the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people. It is the visible speech if not the voice of the democracy. It is the phonograph of the world (Stead, 1886b, 656)." In the early part of the twentieth century, James Bryce pronounced the newspaper press as the reason why democracy was possible in large countries. In his view, liberty of the press was the "ark of the Covenant in every democracy" (Bryce, 1921, 92 - 93). Although couched in a more modest style, similar sentiments permeate the reports of the three Royal Commissions on the press conducted in England between 1945 and 1976 (cf. Aspinall, 1949; Boyce, 1978).

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Correspondingly, an analogous outlook is to be found in the Commission on the Freedom of the Press conducted in the United States in 1947 (cf. Berry et al., 1995; Siebert et al., 1956). To a greater or lesser extent, this ethos equally pervades the popular understanding of the role of journalism as well as the perception taken by journalists of their role and responsibilities (cf., Abramson et al., 1988; Anderson et al, 1994; Entman, 1989; Gitlin, 1991; Grossman, 1995; Hackett & Zhao, 1998; Minogue, 1989; Rosen, 1996; Schudson, 1996 & 1978).

Besides furnishing evidence of a fleeting poetical imagination at work, statements like these also intimate something of the larger vision animating the literature. Any assertion about the importance of journalism is a consequence of its presumed relationship with the public and public life: beneath the oratory lies an image of both democracy and the workings of the public through and by which the tasks ascribed to the media are defined and grounded. No matter how often it is told, the story of media-in-politics concerns the sustenance of an autonomous, rational democratic public life. In order for democracy - broadly understood as being the rule of the people - to thrive, it is thought that the public life upon which it depends requires the establishment of a process of discussion and deliberation between citizens and the state. This process needs to go beyond and involve much more than the occasional aggregation of interests and preferences through formalized electoral devices or the informal, fragmentary snapshot of collective moods provided by opinion polls. Public deliberation of this kind is believed to be essential to democracy, "in order to ensure that the public's policy preferences - upon which democratic decisions are based - are informed, enlightened, and authentic (Page, 1996,1)." Ideally, such unfettered and unrestrained discourse will culminate in the formulation of rational "public opinion" which will, in turn, legitimate and dictate the actions of government. This understanding of the public as a sovereign, participatory and reasonable entity, however idyllic or naive it may be, serves as the normative foundation for the literature's understanding of constitutional democracy

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(Habermas, 1989a, 4).

For Habermas, the rational kernel within the shell of all this rhetoric is the concept of an autonomous, institutionalized arena of discursive interaction that emerges between the realm of public authority of the state and the private realm of civil society and the family. This realm, also known as the *public sphere*, exists as a domain distinct from both state and market where individual citizens, whatever their personal status, can assemble to discuss and question their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are already and always embedded (Keane, 1984, 2). For some observers, like Habermas, a defining and distinctive feature of this engagement is the medium through which it occurs: people's public use of their reason (Habermas, 1989a, 27). Through the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern the public sphere is thought to develop into a space in which private individuals can exercise formal and informal control over the state. Formal control is exercised by means of the election of governments while informal control is exerted through the pressure of public opinion (Curran, 1991a, 29). The media are a central component in this process since they are seen as the major mechanism "by which citizens are informed about the world and the activities of their political representatives, come to form their opinions as to political and social issues and are enabled to exercise a genuine choice between different policies (Sparks, 1991, 58)." At the same time, the media are also one of the means by which political representatives gain a picture of what their constituents and the larger public think and feel about a variety of issues.

The scale of contemporary life necessitates that "communications between leaders and citizens, between the government and the larger society, and between contending political groups are conveyed and filtered through a media screen (Spragens, 1990, 206)." Logistical necessity dictates that the media act as the main vehicles of public communication and deliberation within the public sphere. The

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large number of citizens in most modern nation-states and the complexity of political problems prompt the implementation of a division of labour in the area of political communication. This division of labour means that some individuals, because of their occupation, will develop (if not need to possess) a greater deal of expertise and knowledge about the political process, political institutions and policy-making. That such a specialization occurs does not disadvantage nor disenfranchise the citizenry. In order to choose and hold representatives accountable, the citizenry needs some means of keeping abreast of current policy developments as well as being well-informed about the action of elected officials. With access to reliable and relevant information, and a variety of opinions on current affairs, individuals will be able to form their own views on important issues and thus prepare themselves for political participation (Dahlgren, 1995, 9). Without this kind of information citizens would not: know what they wanted their public officials to do; know what their representatives were actually doing; have any way or means of holding these officials to account (Page, 1995, 5). Ultimately, as John Stuart Mill remarked, democratic government

> consists of acts done by human beings; and if the agents, or those who choose the agents, or those to whom the agents are responsible, or the lookers-on whose opinion ought to influence and check all of these, are masses of mere ignorance, stupidity, and baleful prejudice, every operation of government will go wrong; while, in proportion as the men rise above this standard, so will the government improve in quality; up to the point of excellence, attainable but nowhere attained, where the officers of government, themselves persons of superior virtue and intellect, are surrounded by the atmosphere of a virtuous and enlightened public opinion (Mill, 1972b, 207).

The media provides a central and generally accessible means by which a spatially dispersed citizenry can learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what course of action is appropriate or desirable for the maintenance of the public good (Dahlgren, 1991, 1). In an ideal society, the media act as an indispensable link between public opinion and the governing institutions of

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a nation state (Boyce, 1978, 21).

While there has been an ample debate about how the media, whatever their specific form, actually works in the communication processes of the public sphere, the tasks that the media *ought* to fulfil in a democratic political system are generally agreed upon. Michael Gurevitch and Jay G. Blumler have deftly summarized these tasks in the following manner(6):

> 1. Surveillance of the sociopolitical environment, reporting developments likely to impinge, positively or negatively, on the welfare of citizens
> 2. Meaningful agenda-setting, identifying the key issues of the day, including the forces that have formed and may resolve them
> 3. Platforms for an intelligible and illuminating advocacy by politicians and spokespersons of other causes and interest groups
> 4. Dialogue across a diverse range of views, as well as between power holders (actual and prospective) and mass publics
> 5. Mechanisms for holding officials to account for how they have exercised power
> 6. Incentives for citizens to learn, choose, and become involved, rather than merely to follow and kibitz over the political process
> 7. A principled resistance to the efforts of forces outside the media to subvert their independence, integrity, and ability to serve the audience
> 8. A sense of respect for the audience member, as potentially concerned and able to make sense of his or her political environment (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1990, 270).

While the phrasing employed in descriptions of these tasks can vary from observer to observer, Habermas believes that a singular, if not, simple idea is reflected and expressed in any such list. For Habermas the mass media "ought to understand themselves as the mandatary of an enlightened public whose willingness to learn and capacity for criticism they at once presuppose, demand, and reinforce; like the judiciary, they ought to preserve their independence from political and social pressure; they ought to be receptive to the public's concerns and proposals, take up these issues and contributions impartially, augment criticisms, and confront the

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political process with articulate demands for legitimation (Habermas, 1996, 378)." By functioning in such a manner the media help establish "all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of will and opinion on the part of a public composed of the citizens of a state" and "generate a communicative power that cannot take the place of administration but can only influence it" (Habermas, 1992a, 446 & 452). A fundamental tenet in this unfolding story is that the media are one of the primary devices for encouraging citizens to participate and act rationally in the democratic process in a more rational manner. A central responsibility ascribed to the media is the development of a more informed electorate since it is believed that a more informed citizenry will create a better and fuller democracy (Schudson, 1995, 204). By providing both the information necessary for deliberation as well as a common, public space within which this information could be circulated and discussed, the media are thought to be key agencies in the facilitation of rational political expression in large-scale nation states.

Examination of this "simple" idea through the prism of a task list like that of Blumler and Gurevitch reveals three overlapping, yet distinct, elements involved in the media acting as the "mandatary of an enlightened public". The first element has a straightforward conspicuousness about it, which might, at first glance, serve to mask its true significance. As Habermas puts it, the mass media "free communication processes from the provinciality of spatio-temporally restricted contexts and permit public spheres to emerge, through establishing the abstract simultaneity of a virtually present network of communication contents far removed in space and time and through keeping messages available for manifold contexts (Habermas, 1987, 390)." Through various forms of communications media the problem of scale within territorial states is, to some degree, resolved. Unlike ancient democracies that were generally confined to the surrounding region of the city-state, modern states are able to extend across greater expanses of territory by the aid of communications media and other such infrastructure. In large nation states the kind

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of communication necessary to sustaining the public sphere requires specific means "for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it" (Habermas, 1974, 136). The media, whatever its form, permits communication to exist between citizens despite the obstacle presented by physical space which might separate them as members of diverse communities within the larger nation state.

It is this attribute of the media that is championed by Tocqueville in his discussion of the role of newspapers in Democracy in America (1840). For Tocqueville, the central defining feature of an egalitarian, democratic society is its tendency to sever and suspend the corporate structures of aristocratic society (Krouse, 1983, 69). Yet, he views the ensuing equality fostered by democracy as being somewhat paradoxical in terms of its potential and consequence. Although democracy equalizes individuals by placing "their whole destiny in their own hands", it also atomizes society. As a result, individuals are imbued with a "presumptuous confidence in their strength, and never imagining that they could ever need another's help again, they have no inhibition in showing that they care for nobody but themselves (Tocqueville, 1966, 508)." Tocqueville's fear is that this atomized private life, which easily enables individuals to become caught up in the pursuit and acquisition of wealth and material goods, will become so all-encompassing that new forms of social and political domination will emerge manner(7). Moreover, such domination and despotism will be easily implemented by "the smallest party" given the degree to which administrative and political power is centralized and concentrated in the hands of a democratic government: consolidation of power in the state being a means by which democrats attempt to eradicate the inequalities of aristocratic society (***Op. Cit.***, 541). In such circumstances, would-be usurpers need only to ensure that "good order" is maintained so that individuals might pursue their private passions undisturbed. Tocqueville notes: "There is no need to drag their rights away from citizens of this type; they themselves voluntarily let them go. They find it a tiresome inconvenience to exercise political rights which distract them from

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industry. When required to elect representatives, to support authority by personal service, or to discuss public business together, they find they have no time. They cannot waste their precious time in unrewarding work (***Op. Cit.***, 540)." Left unchecked, the sense of individualism fostered by democracy politically disengages people and leaves them vulnerable to the encroachments of power (Krouse, 1983, 71).

Tocqueville believes that an adequate constraint against the atomism, materialism and privatism inherent in democratic societies is to be found in inducing "a great number of citizens to value the affection of their kindred and neighbours, bring men constantly into contact, despite the instincts which separate them, and force them to help one another (Tocqueville, 1966, 511)." Social and political institutions need to be designed and arranged so as to provide individuals with a "thousand continual reminders" that they live in a society and share a number of mutual interests with others. Newspapers were one institution that Tocqueville saw as providing the means by which to persuade individuals that their private interest was served by voluntarily uniting their efforts to those of all the others (***Op. Cit.***, 517). Newspapers could put the same information, ideas and opinion before a multitude of readers. In doing this, the newspapers' intrusion into the world of the individual was both voluntary and minimal: people could access the information about matters of common social and political importance without being too distracted from their private affairs (***Ibid.***). By bestowing this kind of exposure to information and ideas, Tocqueville believed that newspapers allowed geographically dispersed individuals united in a common interest or project to surmount the spatial-temporal barrier that might otherwise prevent them from acting. A greater number of individuals are now able to acquire and access information than had been the case previously through the exchange of letters or production and dissemination of manuscripts. By means of publication or broadcast, information became more fully known by being shared and socially accessible to all individuals. As John Dewey

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observed, "record and communication are indispensable to knowledge. Knowledge cooped up in private consciousness is a myth, and knowledge of social phenomena is peculiarly dependent upon dissemination, for only by distribution can such knowledge be either obtained or tested (Dewey, 1927, 176 - 177)." In providing both information as well as a "public" space accessible to all, Tocqueville considered newspapers to be crucial components in democracy since "the more equal men become and more individualism becomes a menace, the more necessary are newspapers. We should underrate their importance if we thought they just guaranteed liberty; they maintain civilization (Tocqueville, 1966, 517)."

In conjunction with the facilitation of communication amongst spatially dispersed individuals, the media also transforms and expands what is understood to be "public": public occasions are made even more public (Meyrowitz, 1985, 287). But, more importantly, through "publication" and broadcast the media create a space that provides an unprecedented degree of popular access to the actions of government. Labelled the "transcendental principle of publicness" by Kant (Kant, 1990, 126), this precept makes up the second element involved in the media's functioning as the "mandatary of an enlightened public". The media are part of a "light of publicity" that transforms the operation of state authority by subjecting it to public contestation and discussion: wide-open, visible, and criticisable rule becomes the preferred alternative to the closed, secretive, and imperious exercise of power (Holmes, 1990, 26). The media makes open or available to the public much of that which was previously hidden from view and done in private(**8**). This enhanced sense of access is utilized as a means of attacking and throwing light upon the covert exercise of power as well as the things done in secret by officials of the state. With the emergence of the media and the public sphere, the state is called upon to make its decisions before the public, so that the reasoning (***ratio***) of the citizenry as opposed to the arbitrary will (***voluntas***) of the prince functions as the source of legitimacy (Peters, 1993, 548). As Habermas observes: "Historically, the polemical

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claim of this kind of rationality was developed, in conjunction with the critical public debate among private people, against the reliance of princely authority on secrets of state. Just as secrecy was supposed to serve the maintenance of sovereignty based on ***voluntas***, so publicity was supposed to serve the promotion of legislation based on ***ratio*** (Habermas, 1989a, 53)." In order for the governed to form their own opinions on political matters, it is crucial that they have access to both political information, and this requires that government decisions are made public. For, "if those in government make decisions in secret, the governed have only inadequate means of forming opinions on political matters (Manin, 1997, 167)."

The media is both a space where the exercise of power is rendered transparent and an instrument for throwing light into the once secret chambers of government. To this end, public opinion, through the conveyance of the media, becomes an instrument of social control (Bentham, 1843a, 279). However, this notion of publicity-as-social-control is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a means to attack the practice of politics as something done in secret by a select few: "The light of the public is the light of Enlightenment, a liberation from superstition, fanaticism, and ambitious intrigue. In every system of Enlightened despotism, public opinion plays the role of an absolute corrective (Schmitt, 1985, 38)." On the other hand, the shift from royal or aristocratic prerogative to public surveillance - "a mode of operation through which power will be exercised by virtue of the mere fact of things being known and people seen in a sort of immediate, collective and anonymous gaze (Foucault, 1980, 154)" - is viewed not only as a check on the actions of the state but also as a punitory power over the citizenry as well: "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost (Foucault, 1980, 155)." The light of publicity

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shines on both governors and governed alike.

In this fashion, the connection established between society and the public exercise of power acts as a "guarantee against the usurpation of sovereignty as a right by the actual power" (Guizot, 1852, 265). Benjamin Constant thought that publicity, in the sense that the actions of both public authorities and institutions were transparent, was the necessary pre-condition for the control that the citizens of free nations must exercise upon the conduct of government (Fontana, 1991, 81). Freedom of the press, Constant noted, was part of an "invisible" surveillance that surrounded governments and "which traced, as it were, around despotism a magic circle: but they could not get out of it without hearing around them the murmuring of general disapproval (Constant *as quoted in* Fontana, 1991, 83)." Through the vehicle of "publicity" of the media actions and deeds of government were put into "public" or open view: in these circumstances, a government acting in an arbitrary fashion risked the disapproval and censure of its' citizen population. It is this ability that is specifically invoked by Hume: "The spirit of the people must frequently be roused in order to curb the ambition of the court; and the dread of rousing this spirit must be employed to prevent that ambition. Nothing so effectual to this purpose as the liberty of the press: by which all the learning, wit, and genius of the nation, may be employed on the side of freedom, and every one be animated to its defence (Hume, 1912, 96 - 97)." By virtue of both their ability to "make things public and known to all" as well as their potential to do so, the media function as gatekeepers who monitor the political process on behalf of the public (Schudson, 1995, 220). Through their capacity as an agent of "publicity", the media serve as an independent watchdog whose vigilance and attentiveness acts as public check upon the possible abuse of power by those in government. It is as a mechanism of "publicity" that the prohibitive effects of a free media are closely linked with the continuing operation of a free and open government (Holmes, 1990, 28).

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Finally, a significant proportion of observers believe that to act as a true "mandatary of an enlightened public" requires that the media do more than just circulate messages back and forth between the government and a dispersed citizenry (Calhoun, 1988, 228). In this line of interpretation, acting as the central instrument of "publicity" of the literature's conception of democracy entails that the media be more than a marquee by which the distribution of information is extended and made accessible to scattered individuals. Residing at the heart of the concept of the public sphere constituted by the mass media is an understanding of collective public representation as a procedure of engaged dialogue, debate and contestation (Cottle, 1995, 276). In such an understanding, a key task for the media is to function and operate as a medium of active, rational and engaged public deliberation. In order to fully and satisfactorily discharge this commission the media ought to provide the public with both information as well as a common, 'public' space within which this information can be accessed and discussed. Besides information, it is asserted that the media needs to provide and encourage the expression of a diverse set of viewpoints on issues of public importance. While a significant component of what the media should do, the provision of a varied and suitably rich diet of information and different perspectives on public matters is only part of the media's duty in securing citizens' civil, political and social rights. As important as the informational environment that they provide, it is also ventured that the media need to foster a public discourse that will allow citizens to shape and define their political tastes and preferences. In this regard, it is essential that the media foment a suitably rational-critical discourse so that the "public" mind is properly focussed when policy decision are being deliberated and decided upon: this becomes especially clear in the literature's assessment of the media's current performance and influence on democratic practice.

The media are believed to facilitate the necessary degree of debate and discussion by their provision of both information as well as a diversity of viewpoints

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and opinions on various public matters. In their provision of this information and the exchange of opinion, the media provide the public with an important part of the resources that they need in order to partake, directly or indirectly, in the process of collective will-formation. James Mill believed that every subject stood a better chance of being thoroughly understood when, "by the delivery of all opinions, it is presented in all points of view; when all the evidence upon both sides is brought forward, and all those who are most interested in showing the weakness of what is weak in it, and the strength of what is strong, are, by the freedom of the press, permitted, and by the warmth of discussion excited, to devote to it the keenest application of their faculties (Mill, 1992, 127)." The open clash of argument and opinion generates public opinion, which in turn shapes and influences the policies of the state and the development of society (Dahlgren, 1995, 8). Without this kind of dialogue and exchange, subsequent policy choices or decisions can not be said to either reflect or embody the interest of the public. Mill believed that if the public made a choice before engaging in discussion on the proposal or issue before them, they could not "choose for themselves". Instead, they were more likely to be following blindly "the impulse of certain individuals, who, therefore, choose for them. That is, therefore, a pretence, for the purpose of disguising the truth, and cheating the people of that choice, upon which all their security for good government depends (Mill, 1992, 129)."

In effect, in this understanding of the media as a mechanism of 'publicity' or 'publicness' the media needs to function as an arena of give and take, for mutual criticism and mutual stimulation, for receiving new ideas and promoting new proposals (Homes, 1990, 28). Above all else, the media is thought of as a mechanism of participatory, rational-critical deliberation. Through the intermediation of newspapers, radio or television, it is believed that a spatially dispersed citizenry can carry out a discussion on public issues. This discussion is no longer limited merely to those within earshot of each other or within the same

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geographical locale: the rational-critical debate originally carried out within reading rooms, salons or other places of public assembly and discussion can now be extended beyond these boundaries. Private persons might enter their views into an argument despite being spatially removed from the others taking part in the same "conversation". Traditionally, this is one of the main reasons why both publicity and freedom of the press have been so frequently espoused in the literature. Liberty of discussion through the media is seen as one method "whereby not merely a few individuals in succession, but the whole public, are made, to a certain extent, participants in the government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise derivable from it (Mill, 1972b, 262)." Alongside the institutions of representative government, the media allow for the formation and flow of public opinion without the need of a specific spatial location for popular assembly.

The right to speak, publish **and** disagree freely serves as a means of clarifying and sharpening opposing arguments, as well as producing decisions that are much more intelligent than any proposals presented at the outset of such a process (Holmes, 1990, 30). But more than this, in providing an accessible source of information and open space for rational-critical debate on political matters to a dispersed citizenry, the media are held to be pivotal entities in the creation of shared national identities or the "imagined political communities" of the modern nation state (Anderson, 1991). Although transportation and telecommunication infrastructures have also played crucial roles in the control of large territories since the Roman empire, the consolidation and cultural integration of the modern nation state, over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was made possible by the parallel development of the first truly mass media: lithographic reproduction (1820s), photography and power printing (1830s), telegraphic newspapers and high-speed printing (1840s), cheaper wood pulp publications (1850s), transatlantic telegraphic news reporting (1860s), illustrated daily newspapers and mass mailing (1870s), halftone photo-reproduction (1880s), motion pictures and mass circulation magazines (1890s), and finally

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broadcasting (1900s) (Beniger, 1987, 352 - 353). In reaching spatially dispersed individuals, the media is thought to construct an inclusive sense of political community that might not exist otherwise. Through their convocation as an audience (be it as spectator, listener or reader or some derivation thereof) individuals become citizens united in a shared public discourse about the future and identity of their respective country (Kaplan, 1997, 331). Differing opinions on political matters are not only conveyed to the attention of state officials, they are also brought to the notice of the larger public. Due to the public expression of opinion through the media, various individuals become aware of the degree to which they share and hold similar views with other citizens. As Manin remarks: "People who express the same opinion become aware of the similarity of their views, and this gives them capacities for action that would not have been available had they kept that opinion to themselves. The less isolated people feel, the more they realize their potential strength, and the more capable they are to organize themselves and exercise pressure on the government (Manin, 1997, 171)." In performing this function, the media serve as a significant stimulus to the forms of collective political action believed to be essential for a healthy democracy.

The Habermasian literature sees the engagement of diverse individuals in a process of rational-critical debate and communication about matters of common importance as a means by which they are constituted into a public of 'citizens' (Habermas, 1989a, 106 - 107)." By defining what is of shared public interest and worthy of collective attention, the media is seen to set the boundaries which define what constitutes the public itself (Kaplan, 1997, 336): the process of public discussion allows the public both to define and come to discover itself as a political entity. To the extent that it exists, the public sphere is thought to exist in the rational-critical reasoning of an active citizenry (Dahlgren, 1995, 8). Although not necessarily a physical or empirically identifiable terrain, in this understanding the public sphere is seen as a space where individuals talk to each other, generate

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political discourses that may in principle be critical of the state, and construct and modify political identities in encounters with others (Deutsche, 1992, 39). The "public" does not exist prior to, but emerges during the course of debate. It is through the process of "open" communication that a population is thought to truly constitute itself as a public.

Although seemingly a "simple" idea on its surface, Habermas's notion of the media as a "mandatary of an enlightened public" contains a number of ambiguities that complicate, if not obfuscate, proper comprehension and definition of the role of played by the media. Moreover, his treatment of the media as the "pre-eminent" institution of the public sphere has served only to distort the nature and extent of its role in a democratic political system. In his descriptions of their role and their impact on the political process Habermas positions the media so as to imply a direct link between its operations as a vehicle of publicity and the form of public deliberation that is thought appropriate in a democratic context. That is, the Habermasian literature assigns tasks to the media with a particular image of what public life and democracy should be in terms of the kind of debate that should take place and the part of the citizenry in this process. This conception directly couples the overall vitality of democracy and its institutional and non-institutional public life to the performance of the media. It holds that through participation in and consumption of a properly functioning mass media citizens can be expected to learn and have their consciousness raised, thereby increasing the possibility of their rational participation and engagement in other social and political spheres (Hagen, 1992, 18). But in so doing, this conception places its theoretical emphasis upon issues and matters of media performance and otherwise ignores questions and concerns having to do with the meta-theoretical discourse and positioning of the media.

The media have always been a contradictory political institution in regards to their perceived impact on the political process as well as their conceptual position.

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Habermas's understanding of the media as a "mandatary of an enlightened public" glosses over this aspect of mass communication's role and theoretical position. Any uncertainty about the ability of the media to sustain a healthy and thriving public life is also rooted in the hazy conceptions of democracy and public opinion that reside at the core of this characterisation of the media's role. At the same time, such a depiction of the media adds to the ambiguity that surrounds questions of their role and position within democracy. That being said, a kernel of truth does reside in its overall theoretical thrust. The media allows a geographically dispersed and otherwise heterogeneous citizen population to have a shared access to information and opinion about social and political matters. The media are the means by which ideas, information and images are placed before the public. By being a mechanism of "publicity" or "publicness", in the sense of providing popular access to the actions of government and circulating information, the media act as the vehicle through which the preferences and intentions of both state and citizenry are disclosed for all to see.

While there has been a great deal written about the media in terms of its political role, the present study will engage the question from a vantage point that differs substantially from the Habermasian claims and arguments made about or for the political role of the media. To that end, there will be little attempt to augment the valuable store of suggestions about how the performance of the media might be made more commensurate with standards suitable to a healthy democracy. Instead, the focus will be upon a particular understanding of the "democratic" values and underlying vision of democracy that the media are supposed to serve and sustain. Ofttimes present in theories of the media is the belief that the current commercial organization and operation of the media brings about the quality of ambivalence in its democratic performance. Undoubtedly, matters of the media's orientation and operation contribute to the paradoxes that arise in attempts to theorize and understand its role. But, as will be argued in the following chapters, it bears noting that the Habermasian expectations about political participation, public opinion and

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deliberation placed upon the media are quite ambiguous in and of themselves. The Habermasian uncertainty about the ability and potential of the media to provide the quality and quantity of public discussion indispensable to a thriving democracy is rooted in the equivocal notions and conceptions of democracy and public opinion that reside at the core of the selfsame theory. That these understandings remain unexamined and unacknowledged is in part a consequence of the manner in which the parameters of inquiry are defined and established in the Habermasian analysis of the media. The most appropriate method of bringing these ambiguities to light will be through a close and detailed inspection of how the relationship between the media and democracy is constructed by Habermas and those inspired by his model. It is necessary to do this since the ambivalence that pervades this consideration of the media and democracy is tightly wound up in the very definition of the former's function. However, before undertaking such a task it will be useful to review the various reasons given in the literature for the media's apparent inability to fulfil its democratic obligations and functions.

Endnotes

1. Especially since the publication and dissemination of McLuhan's Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man the proclivity for optimistic prodigality has flourished. For the case contra this line of argument and an interesting corrective to such tendencies see Winston, 1986.

2. In many ways, such a position recalls John Dewey's observation in regards to the relative health of democracy that: "The old saying that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy is not apt if it means that the evils may be remedied by introducing more machinery of the same kind as that which already exists, or by refining and perfecting that machinery. But the phrase may also indicate the need of returning to the idea itself, of clarifying and deepening our apprehension of it, and of employing our sense of its meaning to criticize and re-make its political manifestations (Dewey, 1927, 144)."

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3. Before the emergence of the printing press, scholars in all parts of Europe spoke and wrote in a shared language of scholarship. They would have been part of an universal culture, Christian in content, Latin in language, which would allow itinerant scholars, were they Christian, to be at home anywhere (Carey, 1979, 10). Whatever the gains realized by the emergence of printing, there was also a corresponding narrowing of the possibilities of communication. As Carey notes, "the rise of printing, which emphasized the vernacular, was concomitant with the decline of Latin. Subsequent developments in scholarship were along national rather than universal lines, and we come to speak, though the phrases merely express a tendency, of German idealism, French rationalism, British empiricism, and American pragmatism – distinctive national variations in scholarly outlook. The differences are not merely linguistic as anyone who has attempted translation knows. The linguistic differences attest to differing underlying structures of thought and interest and create extreme difficulties in, though they do not defy, bringing together and negotiating these discrepant frames of reference (Carey, 1979, 10 – 11)."

4. Once again, this is another instance in which segments of the discussion of the media and politics can trace a long and healthy lineage. For instance, in regards to the assumptions and precepts of the "freedom of the press" argument John Stuart Mill wrote: "The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by, when any defence would be necessary of the 'liberty of the press' as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government. No argument, we may suppose, can now be needed, against permitting a legislature or an executive, not identified in interest with the people, to prescribe opinions to them, and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear. This aspect of the question, besides, has been so often and so triumphantly enforced by preceding writers, that it needs not be specially insisted on in this place (Mill, 1972a, 83 - 84)."

5. Statements on the role and function of the press are legion. However, there are a handful which have remained seminal accounts in the literature: For example see Milton, 1927; Trenchard & Gordon, 1971 - No. 15 "Of Freedom of Speech: That the same is inseparable from Publick Liberty"; Mill, 1992; Mill, 1972a; Bentham, 1843a; Kant, 1991 - "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?".

6. An extended discussion of the expectations of the public concerning the media and how these media should organize and conduct themselves can be found in McQuail, 1994.

7. The fear that individuals might pursue and enjoy their private independence, pleasure and interest over that of their share in political power was also expressed by

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Constant, 1988: see especially pages 309 - 328.

8. For further discussion of the public/private dichotomy see Bobbio, 1989, chapter 1 - especially pp. 17 - 21; and Bobbio, 1987, chapter 4. For discussion on how the media, especially in its electronic form, alters and transforms the notion of what is understood as "public" see Thompson, 1995, chapters 4 & 8; as well as Meyrowitz, 1985, chapters 6 & 14.

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Chapter Three:

The Crisis of Civic Communication

> *Latterly, however, the newspaper has developed another side. Though it still claims to stand as the purveyor of truth and the disinterested counsellor of the people, it is now primarily a business concern, an undertaking conducted for profit like any other. The proprietor has begun to dwarf the editor. ... The proprietor is a man of business, and though he may desire power as well as money, profit comes before political opinions. The editor and his staff may be animated by the purest public spirit and may believe all they write, but the proprietor must make money by extending his circulation and (through the circulation) the more considerable returns from advertisements. When the function of purveying truthful news and tendering sound advice seems to conflict with that of increasing the paper's circulation, the obvious way of attaining the latter aim is by taking the line most likely to please the buyers.*
>
> James Bryce, Modern Democracies

Commentary on the media, whether the product of either a scholastic or a more popular orientation, frequently unfolds within a larger narrative about the trials and tribulations of modernity. More often than not, this chronicle recounts the various vices thought to plague modernity: that modern life is increasingly alienating, that modern culture is increasingly trivial, that modern experience is increasingly dissatisfactory, and that modern knowledge is increasingly shallow (Jensen, 1990, 10; see also Berman, 1988). An underlying conviction within this account is that the current operation of the media (especially the electronic media) serves mostly to enhance and sustain these corrosive characteristics and dispositions. For example, the ascendance of television as a predominant force in both intellectual and aesthetic matters is the primary catalyst for a great deal of trepidation. Its apparent preeminence has caused one commentator to speculate that "we are witnessing, without adequate recognition and alertness, a fundamental transformation of the human condition itself, namely, the erosion of print culture and its substitution by a

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video culture incapable of mental abstraction (Sartori, 1989, 53)." When discussing television's relative paramountcy and impact in contemporary life Robert MacNeil equates the position of television as being similar to that of the church in medieval Europe. In his view both function as the matrixes of thought, the boundaries of popular imagination: they explain everything. But while television provides wide limits for the popular imagination to work within, MacNeil sees these perimeters as rarely being very deep (MacNeil, 1997, 117).

One of the more noticeable ramifications of this kind of impression is that a palpable sense of anxiety comes to hover about discussions of the role and place of the media in modern life. This apprehension is particularly evident in explanations of how the media interact with and report on the political process. Again and again, journalists, scholars and politicians voice the fear that developments in contemporary media technology and journalistic practice have essentially deprived the public of a clear, articulate voice in public affairs. For many, the media have virtually severed their links with political life resulting in the almost total abrogation of the public sphere and active citizen participation in the democratic order of things (Sparks, 1988, 209). The significance of this kind of conclusion is all the more telling since, as discussed in the previous chapter, it has traditionally been the claim that the media should act and function as a central guarantor of political democracy (Wheeler, 1997). Therefore, the primary focus and attention of the literature tends to be on how the performance of the media might be improved and made conducive to producing a more vigorous public sphere.

In theory, the proper functioning of a mass democracy is seen to require, ideally at least, that the media provide the public with "some coherent sense of the broader social forces that affect the conditions of their everyday lives" (Gamson et al, 1992, 373). On paper, the media are viewed as a potential vehicle for public activity through communication, insofar as they grapple with the challenges of

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defending the public interest (Aufderheide, 1991, 169). In order to do this a central element of the democratic duty of the media is taken to be the provision and facilitation of "a free dialogue among equal participants oriented toward their common purpose" (Spragens, 1990, 126). Moreover, the media are not only to provide the information necessary for debate and the formation of opinion but they are also to act as a site for the exchange and expression of different views. In practice, however, the predominant judgment is that the media generally operate in ways that promulgate apathy, cynicism, and quiescence, rather than active citizenship and participation. Moreover, the overall trend in the media seems to be towards more messages from fewer and bigger producers saying less and less (Gamson et al, 1992, 391). This chapter will review and examine the reasons usually cited in the literature as to why the media fail to meet the democratic expectations that have been traditionally invested in them. Most of these accounts focus on the perceived impact that the operation and organization of the media as private, profit-driven enterprises is believed to have upon its performance as a civic entity. For many observers the commercial operation and orientation of the media functions as an obstacle that prevents and inhibits the media from sustaining and producing the breadth and depth of deliberation thought necessary to a healthy public sphere.

Diagnosis of dysfunction by the media is part and parcel of a larger narrative tracing the apparent decline and stagnation of democracy. A widespread view in many contemporary analyses of the Western political process is that the prevailing condition of the public sphere falls far short of the standards and ideals thought to define and constitute a healthy and thriving democracy. That this is the case is something of a paradox. Over the past twenty-five years communication technologies have, by all accounts, become ever more sophisticated, faster, and multi-dimensional in their capacity to convey and process information (see Abramson et al, 1988; Friedland, 1996). However, while this has meant an increase in the quantity of political speech and information available to the citizenry, it has not been

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matched by a parallel development in the quality of political discourse that circulates in the public sphere (Herbeck, 1999, 43). Although occasions occur when citizenry, politicians and the media do engage in "open, critical public debates about the uses of power" such instances are thought to be increasingly rare events (Bennett, 1993). Instead, the contemporary situation has provoked a spate of lamentations over the seeming 'death of public argument', especially in the context of contemporary American politics (cf. Collins & Skover, 1996; Entman, 1989; Kellner, 1990; Postman, 1985). Going by both the tone and language utilized in these accounts, the prevalent trend would appear to constitute nothing less than a "crisis of civic communication". The components of this crisis are both numerous and diverse in their severity and significance. Blumler and Gurevitch have identified the foremost of these maladies as being: the depoliticization of media portrayals of politics, as personalities and events are favoured over policies because of the media's investment in their perceived non-partisanship; an excess of political communication that generates cynicism; a lack of political communication that serves the citizen role; the exclusion of voters from having any significant stake or say in public communication; and an over-emphasis on criticism and the relentless search for scandal that seemingly places the media in the role of surrogate opposition (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 203 - 221).

In view of this set of circumstances, the current performance of the media is perceived to be acting so as to inhibit and constrain the flow of ideas and information as opposed to enhancing and enriching it (Lichtenberg, 1990a, 102). Many observers argue that rather than carrying out their proper democratic function of providing the information necessary to bring into being an informed citizenry, the actual impact of the media has been to further the growth of excessive corporate and state power (Kellner, 1990, xiii). The space of the public sphere is seen as being invaded and colonized by images and discourse, whose purpose is to sell, seduce and enthral rather than engage and inform. Evidence of this, readers are told, is especially visible

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in the ways that politics is communicated to the public. Again and again, descriptions are provided about how the media render a picture of the political context that is "illusionary and delusionary – disfigured, unreal, disconnected from the true context of our lives. ... The coverage is distorted by celebrity and the worship of celebrity; by the reduction of news to gossip ..., by sensationalism, which is always a turning away from a society's real condition; and by a political and social discourse that we – the press, the media, the politicians *and* the people – are turning into a sewer (Bernstein *as quoted in* Alger, 1996, 433)." A general malaise appears to be slowly enveloping all facets of political communication. The capacity of the media to function as a watchdog is hamstrung by the increasing dominance of tendencies towards personalization, dramatization, witch-huntery, soap-operatics and sundry trivialities. In the present media environment it is difficult for unconventional opinions to gain admittance to the established 'marketplace of ideas' and political arguments are often no more than slogans and taunts (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 1). The end result is a growing suspicion about manipulation, and a concomitant proliferation in cynicism on the part of the public.

This impoverished manner of addressing and informing individuals is thought to have so deeply established itself that "the political communication process now tends to strain against, rather than with the grain of citizenship. While politicians often behave as if planting ever more clever messages in the media could be a miracle cure for their power predicaments, journalists often deploy disdain, scorn and shock-horror exposures as ripostes to their threatened autonomy. Meanwhile, the voter is left gasping for 'civic-ly nourishing air' - not expecting to be given it and surprised when it is offered. Our civic arteries are hardening (***Op. Cit.***, 1995, 203)." Moreover, it is believed that the resultant deteriorated circumstance of public life has facilitated the loss of democracy's participatory vitality to the encroachment of political-administrative power (Rodger, 1985, 203). The burgeoning debasement of public communication is not the only respect in which the contemporary political

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process is found wanting. Inspection of the extent and quality of current citizen participation and involvement in politics furnishes further corroboration of a disquieting predicament embracing contemporary democratic practice. Data from empirical studies conducted over the past fifty years conveys a rather disheartening picture of a number of unfolding tendencies within the body politic. Amongst other things, these developments include: a steady decline in voter turnout at the ballot box; a rising dis-enfranchisement on the part of the public with their leaders and institutions; as well as the public's astonishing absence of knowledge about either current policy issues or more elementary aspects of the political structure within which they function as citizens (Neuman, 1986).

Accordingly, the public sphere does not serve as a space where citizens can freely participate as equals in a discussion concerning their collective goals and desires. Rather, it has become a "managed show" where political and economic elites seek and cultivate the acclamatory assent of a population that is ever more excluded from both public discussion and the decision-making process (Thompson, 1990, 113). Just as the idealized version of the public sphere finds some resonance with facets of the democratic traditions of Athens, this dystopian rendition also can locate a predecessor in the political customs of the ancient Greek world: Sparta. In this model of democratic decision-making, power was exercised through direct participation of the citizenry, but without the opportunity for careful debate and deliberative argumentation found in the Athenian context (Fishkin, 1995, 23 – 24). In ancient Sparta candidates for the Council were selected by a method called the Shout:

> The selection was made in the following way. The assembly gathered, and picked men were shut up in a nearby building where they could neither see out nor be seen, but could only hear the shouts of those in the assembly. For in this instance, as in others, it was by shouting that they decided between the competitors. These were brought in, not all together, but one by one in an order determined by

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> lot, and each walked through the assembly in silence. The men who had been shut up had writing-tablets, and so in each case they noted the volume of shouting without knowing the identity of the competitor, except that he was the first brought in, or the second, or the third, and so on. Whoever was met with the most shouting, and the loudest, was the man declared elected (Plutarch, 1988, 38 – 39).

The quantity and intensity of the decision-makers' acclamation was tabulated independent of any context in which collective sense might be made of the issues involved (Fishkin, 1995, 25). It is simply the case that the loudest noise or "shout" carries the day. Ideally, individuals are supposed to enter the public sphere as critical participants in an ongoing and open dialogue. In actuality, they have become a manageable resource that is manipulated and utilized by a variety of elites and organizations to impart the veneer of *democratic* legitimacy, however thin, to their claims and goals.

More than anything else, critics hold the present organization and operation of the media accountable for their seeming inability to perform their ascribed role in political life. In order to understand why the media generally serve democracy so poorly, the argument goes, one needs to look at their economic structure and the corresponding impact this has on how the media function in the public sphere. The economic structure and location of media-as-business is seen to undermine or complicate the realization of their civic role: superficially, it might be said that this is another instance in which money is thought to be the root of all evil. A central contention at work in the literature is that the preoccupations of commercialism undermine the traditional standards of journalism and magnify a tendency towards sensationalism and "tabloidization". This kind of argument is especially prominent in analyses of news media (cf. Entman, 1989; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kellner, 1990; Parenti, 1986; Schiller, 1989). It is in their role of supplying "news" and information that the media are believed to primarily provide the type and kind of information and opinion required by the democratic process.

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At their most general level of abstraction, such arguments suggest that the for-profit orientation of commercial media organizations infuses and influences all aspects of decision-making (Hoynes, 1994, 28). Having become parts of larger economic interests and corporations, the media are subsequently operated and run as businesses and as such adhere to a concern for the bottom line of profitability. The provision and distribution of information falls prey to the algebra of attracting the largest possible audience in order to guarantee profitable "market shares" and maintain advertising revenues by being neither too demanding nor controversial. In their competition for both audience shares and advertising revenues, different media organizations tend to produce very similar news (Entman, 1989). Consequently, it is a very shallow pool of information that the citizenry can draw upon in their attempts to make sense of the social-political landscape or act within it. More specifically, some accounts in this tradition contend that the integration of the media into the corporate world results in the emergence of an information-cultural complex with close ties to government (Curran, 1996, 87; cf. Bagdikian, 1992; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Parenti, 1986; Schiller, 1989). Furthermore, amalgamation of the media-as-organization into the corporate world results in a corresponding transformation of the perspective and voice to be found in the media. Enmeshed within the logic of capitalism, the media become "a major, political, social, and cultural force; its information and entertainment programming are saturated with ideologies, messages, and values that promote the interests of dominant elites and legitimate their rule (Kellner, 1990, 67)." Correspondingly, Kellner asserts that the media play a dual role; as both business machine and an ideological apparatus, they assume crucial functions in the development of contemporary capitalism and the process of capital accumulation (***Ibid.***).

Nonetheless, care needs to be taken when utilizing an analysis of the ways in which communicative activity within the media is structured by the unequal

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distribution of material and symbolic resources. If applied in too indiscriminate and unqualified a manner, this kind of theorization gravitates towards a simple-minded instrumentalism. In such a framework the present state of civic communication is explained as being caused by capitalist owners of the media unduly exerting their economic influence in order to ensure that the flow of public information is essentially in accordance with their interests and that of the corporate world. As opposed to facilitating and enhancing democratic communication it is thought that the media function in order to shore up the capitalist system. Unfortunately, the simple answers and certainties provided by such a perspective have often proved too strong a temptation to resist. For example, the "propaganda model" offered by Herman and Chomsky asserts that "the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general population is allowed to see, hear and think about, and to 'manage' public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, xi)." For them, the agitprop character of the news is believed to necessarily follow from the fact that the news is produced by a concentrated industry of several dozen profit-oriented conglomerates, dependent on advertising for revenues, government officials for information and intimidated by right-wing pressure groups (Schudson, 1996, 145).

Yet, at best, this point of view is only partly correct. As Murdock and Golding remark:

> Government and business elites do have privileged access to the news; large advertisers do operate as a latter-day licensing authority, selectively supporting some newspapers and television programmes and not others; and media proprietors can determine the editorial line and cultural stance of the papers and broadcast stations that they own. But by focussing on these kinds of strategic interventions they overlook the contradictions within the system. Owners, advertisers and key political personnel cannot always do as they would wish. They operate within structures which constrain as well as facilitate, imposing limits as well as offering opportunities (Murdock & Golding, 1996, 15).

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There exist a number of countervailing influences within the media that prevent economic domination from totally suffocating or eradicating journalistic independence. Besides considerations of profitability, the media must also attend to their own legitimation. Such legitimation depends upon the maintenance of the integrity of their relationship with their audience as well as the integrity of their own self-image and of the social relationships that compose the profession of journalism (Hallin, 1985, 139). The need for audience credibility and political legitimacy, the self-image and professional commitment of journalists, and the normative public support for journalistic independence are important influences mitigating against the capitulation of commercial media to the business and political interests of the corporate sector (Curran, 1991b, 88). As well, the market allows for a differentiated media of communications and products to exist in which different types of information and communication are available to different audiences. Moreover, there is no inherent reason to assume that the narrow economic interest of the media-as-commercial operation will always coincide with the political interest of the system (Hallin, 1985, 137). An explanation that holds that large corporations and the media work hand-in-glove cannot explain why corporations in the early 1970s were so incensed at how the media covered politics, the environment, and business (Schudson, 1996, 144). Nor does the promotion of corporate interests necessarily explain the perceived divergence of the media from the kind of communication and flow of information deemed indispensable to a healthy democracy. After all, if it was the case that knowledge and free debate were the means by which to secure the attention and loyalty of the public, and in so doing ensure maximum profits, then it would be a very foolish capitalist who filled a newspaper with anything else (Sparks, 1988, 212). Instead, the market allows for a differentiated media of communications in which different media products carry different levels and kinds of information that are utilized by different segments of the public according to their individual needs and demands.

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Furthermore, it cannot be assumed, as has been done in the past, that ownership or manipulation of the means of mass communication necessarily confers power over others in any straightforward or predictable manner (McQuail, 1979, p. 91). On the surface, the assumption that the media possess a considerable power and influence over the political process appears to have some degree of strength in terms of logic and plausibility. Much of the information concerning political reality that individuals receive is derived at second or third hand through layers of intermediaries like the media. Given the relative strength of the logic of this premise, it would appear that a large part of the literature believes that the matter is settled. Assuming that the mass media and their products, whatever their form, do influence political opinion the goal of the various studies then becomes to discover who has access to use this power in terms of ownership and other forms of legal, economic, and political control rather than whether the media have power and how it works (***Ibid.***). Indeed, in both impressionistic and empirical studies, the influence of the mass media on the political process has been extensively examined. Mass media, especially television, have had an enormous impact on the manner in which electoral campaigns are designed, organized and executed and the means by which a government conveys a particular political *message*. In particular, the involvement and influence of the media on electoral campaigns in terms of their organization, orientation and the issue of agenda setting, has attracted a considerable degree of attention. However, whether it is the case of the mass media affecting the actions of politicians or politicians adapting themselves to a new medium still remains uncertain. Indeed, the design and organization of an electoral campaign so as to accommodate the perceived requirements of television reflects a belief in the assumed power of television to win elections as much as it is an utilization of current communications technology (Davis, 1993).

However, despite its plausibility there is little empirical evidence to support, or for that matter repudiate, the initial supposition that the media have some form of

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power over their audience. While a great deal of research has been carried out on the question of the effects and influence of the media, the results have been unable to clearly indicate the nature of the audience effects or the influence of the media (McQuail, 1979, p. 70-71; McLeod et al., 1991). Research points to the mass media functioning as an ***agenda-setter*** in that they may not be able to tell individuals what to think or alter deeply held views, but they can influence what people think about. Furthermore, more recent research has suggested that the agenda-setting function of the mass media through its concentration on particular aspects of political life and inattention to others sets the terms by which political judgements and political choices are defined and made (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 4). Nevertheless, other research has intimated that the strength of the agenda-setting influence is inversely related to the salience of the topic to the audience: that is, individuals are more likely to accept media information and interpretation of issues in which they lack either direct experience or strongly held dispositions.

The absence of any systematic evidence demonstrating a strong link or causal connection between the cognitive impact of mass media with attitudinal and behavioural consequences does not refute the significance attributed to the mass media in the political sphere. Instead, it suggests that the initial presupposition within the literature that one can treat the mass media as an instrument of social power needs to be examined with greater care than has been demonstrated in previous studies. The question of how such power might work is far too critical a factor to go unquestioned, since it has major implications and ramifications in regard to the design and direction of future research. As McQuail notes:

> There are likely to be important structural variations in the power relationship established between 'sender' and 'receiver' in mass communication, which need also to be clarified. Compared to other forms of compliance, the case of mass communications is somewhat unusual, since it is generally entered into voluntarily and on apparently equal terms. Given such a situation, it is not so obvious

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> how a position of dominance can usefully be attained by the 'communicators'. ... [M]ore attention should be given to the various structures of legitimation which attract and retain audiences and which also govern their attitudes to different media sources. There are critical differences between alternative forms of control from above and between alternative types of orientation to the media, both within and between societies (McQuail, 1979, p. 91).

Individuals are not to any extent coerced into using the various agencies of mass media: reading a newspaper or magazine, listening to the radio or watching television are choices which are primarily determined and entered into relatively voluntarily by the specific individual. Research in the ***uses and gratifications*** tradition suggests that individuals choose to pay attention or the degree of attention given to a specific agency - be it newspaper, radio or television - to fulfil a mixture of needs. That is, individuals might use media content for the separate or tandem purpose of information, entertainment or a sense of vicarious involvement or participation in some occurrence like an election or some sports event. As a result, specifying why an individual consumes a particular media product becomes difficult since the mixture of needs that various individuals are attempting to fulfil will be of a different nature in each particular case. Additionally, the combination of media agencies utilized by an individual, the reasons for their use, and the differing levels of attention paid to such instruments further complicates designating the nature of any potential *power* or influence that the mass media might possess as a collective entity. As such, *control* vis-á-vis the ownership or operation of media agencies might not confer upon the possessor any particular or significant dominance over the audience.

As well linkages between the media and the larger configuration of private ownership and market-orientated economics are not an entirely new or unexpected development. In fact, the growth of communications systems is inextricably linked to both the rise of mass democracy and the advancement of mass consumption (Murdock, 1992, 19). While the contradictory relations between capitalist economics

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and liberal democratic politics is an ongoing source of debate and analysis (cf. Bowles & Gintis, 1986; Dryzek, 1996; Held, 1996 - especially chapters 6 & 9; Lindblom, 1977), the tension between these two realms is also perceived as playing a pivotal role in the emergence of the public sphere(1). This is, in part, the essence of Habermas's argument in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: that the development of early modern capitalism brought into being an autonomous arena of public debate in which a reason-based consensus could be forged to shape the direction of the state. As Curran notes, "the economic independence provided by private property, the critical reflection fostered by letters and novels, the flowering of discussion in coffee houses and salons and, above all, the emergence of an independent, market-based press, created a new public engaged in critical political discussion (Curran, 1991b, 83)."

Whether viewed in a positive or negative light, contemporary communications systems are positioned at the centre of a contradictory set of relations between capitalist economics and liberal democratic politics, consumerism and citizenship (Murdock, 1992, 19). The crux of the dilemma facing the media is that they are supposed to cultivate and uphold traditions which require active, public-spirited individuals while being based on a process of "state-guaranteed market competition which encourages individuals to see themselves as private selves, as private property owners who stay ahead of others by out-competing them (Keane, 1991, 46)." Given that they operate both as a commercial entity and as a key institution in the political process the media function within two distinct yet overlapping sites: the forum and the marketplace. Each of these realms is driven by and composed of contradictory set of principles and social relations that these value systems necessitate and sustain. The traditions of the forum or political realm define the individual "as a citizen exercising public rights of debate, voting, and so on, within a communally agreed structure of rules and towards communally defined ends. Within the economic realm (or marketplace), on the other hand, the individual is

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defined as producer and consumer exercising private rights through purchasing power on the market in the pursuit of private interests, his or her actions being coordinated by the invisible hand of the market (Garnham, 1986, p. 46)." From the friction produced between these two realms emerge mutually antagonistic notions of individual freedom. In the marketplace, freedom for the individual is the ability to pursue private interest without outside interference or constraint. While in the forum, freedom is defined more in terms of the collective pursuit of the public good in which all citizens should have the opportunity to participate and benefit equally. A tension emerges since as consumers and producers individuals try to serve and maximize their own interest, while as citizens they are supposed to develop and work within a more communal interest and perspective.

The media sit uneasily between the both the private and public realm: they are not clearly part of either domain. This tension within the theoretical understanding of the media plays itself out in a number of different ways. At the most basic level the practical and conceptual position of the media necessitates that some kind of trade off be established between the media as a private, commercial enterprise with corresponding rights and obligations and public speech as the deployment of individual rights with a corresponding set of civic obligations and values. As privately owned commercial enterprises the primary objective of the media is the maximization of the various internal benefits that result from the supplying of goods that consumers are willing to pay for. Like any other commercial entity, the media attempt to sell a product that matches and appeals to the tastes and preferences of its customers. In this capacity, the producers tailor their products according to these goals and objectives, they make choices about what they will and will not include in their broadcasts or newspapers: the products that they produce are designed primarily so as to appeal to the public-as-consumers. However, some of these products are seen and understood, by people both inside and outside the media, as the means by which various individuals can make their thoughts and ideas public. As such, the

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media are conceived of as a vehicle by which individuals can publicly exercise their individual rights of free speech and thought. The free and open discussion of a wide array of opinions, ideas and beliefs is believed to be a process that is ultimately beneficial to both the community and the individuals who reside within it (Mill, 1972a). Yet the extent to which public discussion can be *free and open* in light of the obligations and considerations that the media possess as a private association is not that clear. Any kind of circumscription of debate, no matter how well intended, only serves to undermine the utility that unrestricted discussion and deliberation can have for the public as a whole and as individuals. Yet such restrictions are likely to occur given the pressures exerted on the media as private associations. Moreover, imposing upon the media the obligation to convey a particular kind of debate undercuts their rights, as private entities, to determine and select the kind of content that they wish to carry. However the conflict is resolved, either the civic or private dimension of the media suffers.

Concurrently existing as a civic and commercial entity, the horns of the dilemma facing the media are especially paradoxical. Straddling the conflicting realms of economics and politics, the essence of the media's role becomes one of ambivalence: it wears the Janus face of information and entertainment, pedagogy and manipulation (Habermas, 1989a, 203). The media help "coordinate production, transportation, and the exchange of wealth; it aids in the search for ways of disposing of surplus and of promoting territorial divisions of labour; but it also promotes knowledge and education and provides political information (Hardt, 1979, 21)." In their civic role they are supposed to convey and relate information which will form the basis of public debate; in their economic role they provide material which individuals will consume for their own gratification and diversion. It is an especially delicate balancing act that the media have to perform as they both respond to the taste of the public while at the same time shaping and forming this taste (Miller, 1993, 133)(2). On the one hand the media are to serve the citizen/consumers who purchase

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media-products to fulfil their various individual needs and desires, while on the other they are held responsible for ensuring that these same consumers act and function as rational and conscientious citizens.

Coiled within the core of the media's mixed mission lies a single ever-vexing complex of problems, a conundrum with a hundred answers, none of which can generate overwhelming or continuous support (Smith, 1973, 46). Like the route between Scylla and Charybdis, potential or actual approaches taken by the media in navigating the conflicting civic and commercial values they must simultaneously serve are unable to offer solutions that will meet every expectation or satisfy all the involved parties. That this is the case is a reflection of the fundamentally immutable nature of the contradiction in which the media is situated. As Garnham notes:

> The contradiction is irresolvable because in social formations characterized by an advanced division of labour, both functionally and spatially, only the market is capable of handling the necessary scale of allocative decision-making across wide sectors of human productive activity, while at the same time there is a range of social decisions which no democratic society will be prepared to leave to the market, or rather if it does leave them to the market, it forfeits all claims to democracy. These include the control of social violence, the provision of a basic level of health and material well-being and above all includes control over the development of the market itself, both in its internal structure, for example, the problem of monopoly, and its externalities, such as environmental questions (Garnham, 1986, 46 – 47).

After such recognition is made, Garnham sees the analytical task as being that of mapping the interactions between the two spheres and the political task as being that of working out a historically appropriate balance between the clashing economic and political values at work within the media (***Op. Cit.***, 47). However, determining what constitutes an 'appropriate' equilibrium between the conflicting value systems is not so easily achieved in either theory or practice. Whether motivated by either civic or commercial concerns any decision taken in regard to the content of the mass media

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is in one way political, in that the decision will tend to influence the nature of the information and the attitudes contained in society (Smith, 1973, 46). Rather than deliver any sense of closure or surety, even the most thought out effort to offset the contradictory expectations placed on the media produces only a feeling of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. The seeds of this dissension are sown within the very nature of the media's simultaneous existence as both civic and commercial organization.

Operating simultaneously across both the political and economic realms, the media face a seemingly endless set of bedevilling questions in regards to how they operate as both civic and commercial entity. When answering them, the media need to uncover a tone of voice that adjusts itself equally to the demands of both democracy and those of the market. As such, it is a project without ultimate solutions. In aggregating its audience what level of taste and comprehension should the media aim for? Should content be watered down and made more entertaining so as to maximize the potential audience? Or should content be presented at a higher, undiluted level so as to better educate and inform? If the media pursue the strategy of audience maximization they are accused of sensationalism, valuing the accumulation of profits and revenues over civic responsibility and duty, indulging the public's appetite for escapism, and failing to provide the type and kind of information necessary for political decision-making. If they take the 'higher road' of providing material that is educational, information driven and pitched at a advanced level of political engagement they are denounced for paternalistic, elitist, intellectual snobbery and failing to serve the full needs of the entire society. All the while, the media have their own objectives and motives as a commercial enterprise to consider and pursue if they wish to survive. Beyond any civic values it may have, the information that the media deliver is a ***commodity***. However the media try to aggregate its audience they need to do so in a way that, as a nineteenth century newspaper editor noted, "the people want and are willing to buy. No matter how choice your selection, if the people will not buy and read your paper, you may as well

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leave the business (*as quoted in* Baldasty, 1993, 99)." As well, individual entities within the media need to keep in mind that they are in competition with each other for the same audience and the direct or indirect revenues to be derived therein. Faced with a choice between a feeling of ethical satisfaction and the opportunity to make receipts meet expenditures there is no guarantee that each and every competitor will opt to fulfill their normative mission over filling the coffers.

Beyond questions of ownership and control, the incompatibility between the commercial and civic functions of the media is seen to be an issue of mutually antagonistic value systems. While the consequences of this antagonism are not directly evident, they nevertheless still exert a significant influence upon the manner in which the media perform its political role. Although held to be a significant factor in the establishment and maintenance of a rich and deep-rooted democratic practice, the media's simultaneous existence as both a commercial operation and as a key institution in the political process conceivably undermines the fundamental character and integrity of this function. Through their provision of information on matters of public interest the media function, in ideal terms at least, as a mediator between the competing forces at work in a society. To the extent that they have become enmeshed within larger corporate structures, the media have, directly or indirectly, become aligned with the social and economic goals of their partners and owners. This chain of events raises the question of whether the media can freely operate as a reliable and impartial mediator among various interests, or be perceived as such, when they are an integral part of one of the more powerful forces in society (Bagdikian, 1992, 151). For other institutions and agents in the political process there exists an elaborate array of laws and conventions which attempt to insulate politicians, public servants and government offices from economic control (Garnham, 1986, p. 47). While as deterrents or guidelines such measures might not always be effective or suasive, a general sentiment exists in most advanced capitalist polities that public office should not be used for private profit or personal gain. Yet,

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despite this consensus, in many countries the main vehicles through which information and opinion about social and political issues are conveyed and communicated are privately owned and operated(3).

Moreover the simultaneous existence of the media as both a civic and commercial entity suggests a way of understanding the media's political position and function that goes beyond the limitations of the ownership/power model. In contrast to the instrumentalist account of the ownership/power model, the hegemony model of the media provides an analysis of the ways in which the values, ideas and beliefs conveyed by the media are the product of a process of contestation and negotiation between competing perspectives. In this instance, the media are understood as one of series of *ideological apparatuses* along with the state, the church, the educational system, and the family that produce the beliefs, ideas and attitudes at work in social and political life (Althusser, 1971, see especially pages 127 - 186). The hegemony model of the media and culture sees dominant ideological formations as a shifting terrain of consensus, struggle and compromise rather than as an instrument of ideological domination that is forced upon the underlying population from above by an unified ruling class (Kellner, 1990, 16). Accordingly the media are best conceptualized as a realm of always shifting and developing hegemony in which temporary consensus is struck around competing political positions, values and views of the world. For the most part, the beliefs, ideas and attitudes propagated by the media tend to be favourably disposed towards the existing set of social and political relations, practices and institutions. However, there is always a struggle and contest over which assumptions, values and ideas are to be at the forefront of media discourse: no set of beliefs or ideological positions are *de facto* dominant and all-pervasive all the time. Hegemony, as Gramsci observed, is never fixed once and for all but is continually subject to negotiation and contestation (Gramsci, 1971). Compared to simplified and monolithic understanding of the media as instruments of ideological domination, this view recognizes the specificity and relative autonomy

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of media discourse. The power of hegemonic ideologies is that their power is consensual rather than coercive: they are not imposed so much as jointly composed and legitimated through an ongoing process of definition and compromise. As noted previously, there are number of countervailing influences at work in the media in their dissemination of information, opinion and entertainment. Besides considerations of profitability or the transmission of values and ideas, the media need to cultivate an aura of independence and credibility with their respective audiences. This legitimation depends upon the maintenance of the integrity of the media's relationship with their audience as well as the integrity of their own self-image and of the social relationships that compose the profession of journalism (Hallin, 1985, 139). The pursuit of profitability does not automatically ensure that the information and opinions conveyed by the media will be necessarily supportive of the established social, economic and political order. Moreover, the products that the media disseminate will be interpreted, utilized and acted upon by audiences according to their own needs, ends and interests. Transmission in no way guarantees that media *messages* will be viewed or understood in the way that their creators intended.

Although economic forces cannot be held directly responsible for the nature and substance of the flow of information furnished by the media, they do play a central role in defining the key features of the general environment within which communicative activity takes place (Murdock & Golding, 1996, 15). The economic structure and location of the media-as-business does not in itself determine the content of the information made available to the public, but it does tend to shape and demarcate the manner in which information is conveyed. The extent to which the media will be able to freely operate is down to the value system and set of social relations within which they must operate and which they serve to reinforce (Garnham, 1986, 47). These values are believed to be inimical, not just to one particular political interest group or another, but to the very process of democratic politics itself (***Ibid.***). The strain between the opposing value systems is especially

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manifest in the tension that arises between the choices of media owners as investors and property owners and the freedom of choice of citizens receiving and sending information (Keane, 1989, 39). This incongruity between the value systems of economics and politics is held to be the central reason and explanation for the media's inability to live up to democratic expectations.

During the initial emergence of the public sphere, the private ownership and operation of the media was not seen to be all that awkward an issue. The early idea of a 'free press' originated in a time of small-scale enterprise and a prevailing belief in decentralized market competition as a remedy against political despotism. A free press was held to function in an equivalent manner to that of a free market: as an unbiased and imperceptible means of guaranteeing the circulation of a diversity of opinion - the marketplace of ideas. As C. Wright Mills observes, a strict set of parallels was constructed between the idea of public opinion and that of the market: "Here is the public composed of discussing circles of opinion peers crowned by parliament; there is the market composed of freely competing entrepreneurs. As price is the result of anonymous, equally-weighted, bargaining individuals supplying and demanding of one another, so is the public of public opinion, with each man having thought things out for himself and contributing his weight to the great formation of the end result, public opinion (Mills, 1963, 579)." Private property in the means and manner of public communication – the production and circulation of opinions and views through the process of commodity production and exchange – was typically believed to be a central ingredient in freedom of communication (Keane, 1991, 45).

Freedom of expression played the same role in the intellectual sphere that the freedom to acquire and dispose of private property played in material production: both involved the freedom to pursue one's own rationally chosen ends without interference (Kelley & Donway, 1990, 70). The link between private property and

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freedom of expression was occasionally stated explicitly:

> Without Freedom of Thought, there can be no such Thing as Wisdom; and no such Thing as publick Liberty, Without Freedom of Speech; which is the Right of every Man, as far as by it he does not hurt or controul the Right of another; and this is the only Check which it ought to suffer, the only Bounds which it ought to know. This sacred Privilege is so essential to free Governments, that the Security of Property, and the Freedom of Speech, always go together; and in those wretched Countries where a Man cannot call his Tongue his own, he can scarce call any Thing else his own (Trenchard & Gordon, 1971, 96).

A country in which a person could not call their tongue their own was one where freedom of speech was not recognized nor respected by the government and the instruments of state. The freedom of expression of individuals needed protection from intrusions by the state: as long as the freedom of speech of one individual did not hurt or *controul* the right of another there was no need for regulation. Although some participants in the marketplace of ideas might have more influence on the state of opinion compared to others, no one person or group could effectively dictate or control the prevailing state of opinion (Mills, 1963, 579). The more significant limitations on freedom of expression, like those that could potentially act upon private property, were believed to come from the ambition and action of governments and the apparatuses of the state. Conflict was thought to exist primarily between the individual and the state, and between ignorance and enlightenment; the exercise of power through structures other than the state was often ignored (Curran, 1991b, 86). As such, it was important that the ownership and operation of the press be placed outside the control and interference of government. To the degree that the press were independent of government and governed by the marketplace of ideas, the security of freedom of expression was believed to be ensured.

However, many critics argue that such confidence in the ability of market competition to ensure the universal access of citizens to the media of public

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communication is unwarranted (Keane, 1990, 46). In Curran's eyes this kind of conception is based on two false premises. The first of these is that the state composes the central threat to the welfare of society (Curran, 1996, 90). Implied within this view is a model of society in which conflict was thought to exist between ignorance and enlightenment and between the individual and the state (Curran, 1978, 60). Defining a watchdog role for the media solely in opposition to the activities of government obscures the role that the media might and should play as a sentry against exploitation and abuse emanating from within the private sphere. Any power or influence exercised by the structures or agencies of government is that of one potential despot among many in advanced capitalist society. The second fallacy is that the media come to be 'independent' by being independent of the state (Curran, 1996, 90). Such a view under-plays the extent to which other entities besides the state might potentially or actually compromise the *independence* of the media. To this end, it has been repeatedly noted that, over time, the media have become firmly integrated into the core sectors of a number of multi-national conglomerates(4). Countless critics have contended that this incorporation effectively compromises the independence of the media and, directly or indirectly, handicaps their critical surveillance on behalf of the public (cf. Bagdikian, 1992; Baker, 1994; Curran, 1991b & 1996; Entman, 1989; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kellner, 1990; Parenti, 1986; Schiller, 1989). In light of the domination of multi-nationals within the products of media enterprise, to speak of the market as a level playing field maintaining a free and open contest is to strain the credibility of such an argument. The marketplace of ideas is not a place where the consumer can go, as the metaphor suggests, from stall to stall sampling from a multitude of wares from an equal number of producers. Instead, the market of ideas within the media "is more like the larger economic market of which it is part: oligopolistic, standardized and most accessible to those who possess vast amounts of capital, or who hold views that are pleasing to the possessors of capital (Parenti, 1986, 31)." While there is a diversity of media products available, they are for the most part being produced by a relatively small

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number of corporations.

The integration of the mass media into larger economic concerns and corporations is thought to have a significant consequence for both the content and form of political communication. In being operated and run like a business, the media's presumed concern for the public interest is believed to be displaced by a concern for profitability, thereby undermining the ability of the media to function as conveyers of democratic values and information and as productive participants in the institutional order. Instead, a "market-driven media system" is seen as being inherently biassed in favour of "affluent consumers, consumerist lifestyles, and seemingly apolitical but sometimes socially corrosive entertainment (Hackett & Zhao, 1998, 224)." As a result, the rise and entrenchment of the commercial press brings about a number of changes that transform both the nature of the media's political role as well as that of the public sphere. First, the transition from state to market control of the media transforms them from being an apparatus of the state into an independent channel of communication between government and governed (Curran, 1978, 53). Secondly, the gradual entrenchment and permeation of economic imperatives and concerns into the framework of the media alters the degree to which they can successfully fulfil or achieve the duties originally ascribed to them. That is, the institutional structure of political communication becomes distorted. Critics contend that commercial pressures have fostered an atmosphere of sensationalism that concentrates on crime, scandals, sex and 'infotainment': news focuses on dramatic personalized stories, episodic and fragmented information, and normalized news representations or frameworks (Norris, 1997, 8; cf. also Bennett, 1988). Thirdly, the influx of commercial values into civic discourse transforms the nature and meaning of political participation for the public. People are addressed primarily in terms of their identity as consumers, both of the communications and information products they buy and of the products promoted in an ever-expanding advertising system (Murdock & Golding, 1989, 180). In fact, the media may communicate to the

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public "a conception of politics and of their own political role that strongly discourages active political involvement (Hallin, 1985, 140)." Finally, influenced and fuelled by the techniques of advertising, politics becomes the art of persuasion, hidden or otherwise, rather than an act of civic commitment. Under the charge of both media and political professionals political communication becomes a matter of short, snappy presentations that meet the criteria of television rather than that of properly informing individuals and sustaining a rich, vigorous public debate. The public sphere becomes a place where the individual voter is treated more as a consumer to be wooed than as a citizen to be enlightened or engaged (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 208). In short, critics see the very nature of *publicity* being transformed from a device of critical participation to that of consumerist manipulation. To better understand these changes in the media's political role and to assess their implications, it is necessary to trace the transformation of the news media from the small-scale political press of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century to the large-scale commercial mass media of the twentieth century.

When initially formulated, the conventional description of the media's political role occurred at a time when the 'press' were both highly politicized and functioning in an adversarial fashion (Curran, 1991b, 86). The relative low start up cost in printing and distributing a newspaper ensured that a diverse set of views and information was available to the reading public. At the outset newspapers saw their main purpose in public affairs to be the expression of a particular point of view in the most forceful and eloquent form that they could manage (Hallin, 1985, 127). Newspapers took very vocal stands pro or contra one set of political interests, throwing their lot in with the government or opposition parties. These factions would in turn provide financial support and patronage to friendly papers. Newspaper editors and owners depended on the financial backing and support of politicians and political parties: in turn, political parties saw newspapers as a means both to

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publicize their particular point of view as well as informing and mobilizing their followers (cf., Leonard, 1986; Sloan, 1994; Smith, 1988 & 1990).

However, changes in the technology of production in the early nineteenth century required both a substantial initial investment of capital as well as a return on this investment that was well beyond that which political subsidy, by itself, could reasonably provide (Hallin, 1985, 128; see also Schudson, 1978). As a result of this the media came to rely less upon sponsorship from particular political parties and more upon revenues derived from advertising and consumer sales. This shift in dependence was reflected in a change in the price per copy that the consumer was charged. In the pre-1830 period newspapers cost six cents per issue at a time when the average daily wage for a worker was less than eighty-five cents (Schudson, 1978, 15). As well, newspapers were available only through subscription: a single copy of a paper could only be purchased from the shop where it was printed. The 'penny press' of the 1830s sold newspapers, as their name would imply, for a penny per issue and on an individual copy basis through street vendors as opposed to yearly subscriptions (**Op Cit.**, 17).

As a result, the economic structure of newspaper publishing was, to some extent, rationalized: market-based income from advertising and sales replaced sources of income dependent upon social ties or political fellow feeling. Revenues from both advertising and sales were both dependent upon the circulation that the newspaper in question could muster. Very simply, the greater a newspaper's circulation in terms of copies distributed and sold the greater its profits and perceived influence. But the maximum economic value of circulation was not in the revenue generated through subscriptions or street sales, but in its ability to determine advertising rates (Baldasty, 1993, 110). Indeed, if truth were told, revenues realized through advertising sales subsidize the price paid by newspaper readers(**5**). As Baldasty notes

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> The marketing calculus for advertisers was twofold. First, advertisers considered the size of a newspaper's circulation; they were willing to pay higher rates to larger newspapers because they wanted to reach as many potential customers as possible. In response, publishers and editors sought large circulation. Second, advertisers analyzed the nature of a newspaper's readership. Advertisers wanted to market their goods to people who had money and who were willing to spend it (***Ibid.***).

Therefore, it was in the best interest of media owners and producers to aim their "product" towards attracting the audience in the demographic range that advertisers saw as the ideal for their respective products and services. Thus, newspapers orientated themselves towards upscale rather than downscale audiences because the former generated a larger advertising subsidy per reader than the latter did (Curran, 1991b, 96)(6). Given the extent to which readers were subsidized by advertising the economic value of an audience carries some considerable weight with editors and publishers. As well as the respective size of their circulation, the perceived linkage between a newspaper and an appropriately upscale market could help influence and determine advertising rates. In the mid-1890s, the *New York Evening Post*, which possessed a circulation of only twenty-five thousand, was charging twenty cents a line for advertising, while the *New York World*, which possessed a circulation twenty-five times larger than that of the *Evening Post*, charged only twice as much (Baldasty, 1993, 110). The divergence between circulation and advertising rates was attributed to "the fact that the *Post* goes to a distinct class – a moneyed class – and for that reason proves a more profitable medium for advertising the highest class of goods than does the *World* (Archer *as quoted in* Baldasty, ***Op. Cit.***)." Moreover, in England, James Curran has noted that there was some evidence that advertisers consciously discriminated against radical papers in the Victorian period. Far from being motivated by ideological concerns, this discrimination was based purely on pragmatic grounds: since their readership had a limited purchasing power the radical papers were seen to be poor advertising media (Curran, 1978, 69). A

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contemporaneous advertising text maintained that for "an average proposition, not a Rolls-Royce motor car or a three-a-penny fire-lighter, you cannot afford to place your advertisements in a paper which is read by the down-at-heels who buy it to scan the 'Situations Vacant' column (*as quoted in* Curran, ***Ibid.***)."

In order to attract a vast number of readers, newspapers began to offer a diverse and varied range of information so as to offer something for everyone (Baldasty, 1993, 105). Starting in the 1830s the newspapers began to reflect the activities of an increasingly varied, urban, and middle-class society of trade, transportation, and manufacturing rather than the affairs and interests of an elite in a small trading society (Schudson, 1978, 22 – 23). The range of information that appeared in newspapers grew and expanded so as to reflect and, more importantly, capture the attention of a growing readership. News about national and international political events appeared as well as those of local interest and import. In addition, the penny press also began to print reports from the police, from the courts, from the streets and from private households (***Ibid.***).

Additionally, newspapers intent on maximizing their circulation (and by implication, the advertising revenues to be gained by reaching a mass audience) could ill afford the potential restriction of their perspective audience through a perceived identification or explicit affiliation with a particular political party or viewpoint (Hallin, 1985, 128). This in turn might reduce advertising revenue since the prospective audience a paper could offer to advertisers would be smaller than that of a competitor who adopted a less controversial, more 'balanced' editorial outlook. Consequently, in place of partisan advocacy and one-sided opinion, an "objective outlook" was adopted which stressed the factual presentation of daily events free from bias and specific interpretive intent(7). For example, the *Baltimore Sun* proclaimed: "We shall give no place to religious controversy nor to political discussions of merely partisan character. On political principles, and questions

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involving the interests of honour of the whole country, it will be free, firm and temperate. Our object will be the common good, without regard to that of sects, factions, or parties; and for this object we shall labour without fear or partiality (*as quoted in* Schudson, 1978, 22)." Breaking with the earlier journalistic tradition, the penny press proclaimed itself politically independent and characterized this stance of nonpartisanship as being the true hallmark of a 'free press'. While partisan newspapers continued to play a significant role in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the great majority had converted to nonpartisanship and objectivity by the 1870s(8).

The ideal of objectivity and its attendant stance of nonpartisanship offer journalistic practice a number of advantages. As compared with the reporting that characterized politically sponsored and motivated newspapers, news reports are more likely to give a measured account of events and occurrences. As a mode of professional conduct 'objectivity' utilizes standards of truth and of the writer's proper relation to their audience that emphasizes a faith in 'facts', a distrust of 'values' and a commitment to their segregation (Schudson, 1978, 6). By this, the media are better able to establish a claim to legitimacy and credibility with the public as well as using this assertion as a basis of furthering their economic objective of realizing revenues through the sale of their respective product. Readers [and viewers] are assured that they are getting all the news that is fit to print rather than an editor's [or producers'] idiosyncratic and doubtlessly biassed view of the world (Lasch, 1997, 84). Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, as it were, the media employ a stance of professional neutrality as a means of satisfying and meeting both civic and commercial expectations.

However, critics feel the advantages offered by the stance of *objectivity* are more than offset by the many disadvantages that are contained within such a gesture. The adoption of an *objective* posture entails a degree of depoliticization in both the

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perspective **and** attitude taken by the media. That is, the media base their claim to legitimacy with the public on their non-political status and on their disavowals of explicitly political, particularly partisan, motives (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 213). Thus, journalists come to think of their role as that of an observer standing above and apart from the political fray, reporting on what is happening so as to allow their audience to draw their own conclusions. To the extent that journalists provide analysis and interpretation, they do so from within an outlook of disinterested professionalism. In order to appear strictly objective even while providing a modicum of analysis and interpretation journalists concentrate on questions of strategy, effectiveness and technique - questions that do not directly call attention to conflicts of interest or clashes over the ends and values of political life (Hallin, 1985, 130). As a result, their primary focus is upon personalities and the flow of events rather than on policies. In electoral campaigns this translates into a fascination with and reliance upon poll results: the campaign, in effect, becomes a horserace. Horserace coverage is marked by several features: 1) winning and losing as the central concern; 2) the language of wars, games and competition; 3) a story with performers, critics and audience (voters); 4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate/leader; 5) heavy weighing of polls and the candidates standing in them (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, 33). Within this framework, the central questions are not those of competing political visions or how the country should be run but rather those of a race: *Who's ahead? Who's falling behind? Who's gaining?* Even when attempting to adopt a more 'critical' demeanor the media focus is not that far removed from the logistics of the race: all that is added is that the reader/viewer is taken 'behind the scenes', into the stables, so to speak. Horserace coverage is merely supplemented by handicapping coverage - stories about campaign tactics, what the organizers were up to, how reporters felt about being handled: in short, *how are the candidates trying to do it to us, and how are they doing it all* (Gitlin, 1991, 120 - 121)*?*

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It is believed that with this shift in portrayal of the political process, a similarly *detached* attitude is transmitted to the audience members as an appropriate perspective on politics (Blumler & Gurevitch). The professionally 'disinterested' angle of vision on the part of the media is believed to reinforce in citizens a view of politics as a spectator sport (Schudson, 1995, 12). Didion contends that contemporary political journalism conveys a picture of the political process as "an end in itself, connected only nominally, and vestigially, to the electorate and its possible concerns (Didion, 1992, 49)." As the 'implied reader' of the news, the electorate is positioned as spectators of a process more and more removed from the realities of their day-to-day life. News about public affairs draws few connections between the content and operation of the political process and the concerns that may be important to the 'implied reader'. The world of the news is a remote one filled with "statements by public officials and other names that are familiar only through their constant appearance in the media; troop movements and natural disasters in distant places; crimes by and against people one does not know; statements about 'trends' in opinion, prices, population movements, welfare rolls; predictions of the future by people one does not know (Edelman, 1988, 34 - 35)(9)." To a certain degree, as Didion observes, when "we talk about the process, then we are talking, increasingly, not about "the democratic process", or the general mechanism affording the citizens of a state a voice in its affairs, but the reverse: a mechanism seen as so specialized that access to it is correctly limited to its own professionals, to those who manage policy and those who report on it, to those who run the polls and those who quote them, to those who ask and those who answer the questions on the Sunday shows, to the media consultants, to the columnists, to the issue advisers, to those who give off-the-record breakfasts and to those who attend them; to that handful of insiders who invent, year in and year out, the narrative of public life (Didion, 1992, 49 - 50)."

Besides eviscerating the quality of political information and opinion, the

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pressure of economic competition is seen to be changing the kinds of information emphasized, diminishing the availability of news that fosters citizenship (Entman, 1989, 117). The logic of the cash nexus is thought to exert an increasing pressure on the media to be thinking always of market shares and ways of increasing them rather than servicing particular public interests or democratic needs. Increasingly, newspaper pages are filled with theme sections, features, listings and other things that editors and publishers think that consumers want, while the information that people *need* in order to communicate within their political community is squeezed into smaller and smaller spaces (Anderson et al., 1994, 7). The enhancement and facilitation of rational public discourse becomes a secondary concern for media outlets which are driven by commercial logic to concentrate on means of attracting and maintaining audiences (cf. Hallin, 1994, pp. 177 – 180). Driven by a concern for revenues and the bottom line, the media produce information that is nothing more than "fairground entertainment ... constituted of thrills, spills and monsters (Minogue, 1989, 482)." In place of in-depth, investigative and informative journalism on subjects of public interest, the media are filled with material concerned with celebrities, leisure issues, and consumer affairs. The trivial and serious are given nearly equal billing even amongst the 'news' media in an effort to maximize their audience share and thereby secure crucial advertising dollars. In such an environment, information and discussion about public issues becomes one of the numerous products available in the media marketplace and by no means the dominant one. The diverse array of media products available to the consumer deliver a formidable melange of entertainment and 'hard' and 'soft' news in varying quantity and strength. The choice lies with the consumer. Habermas observes that: "Because the public's receptiveness, cognitive capacity, and attention represent unusually scarce resources for which the programs of numerous 'stations' compete, the presentations of news and commentaries for the most part follows market strategies. Reporting facts as human-interest stories, mixing information with entertainment, arranging material episodically, and breaking down complex relationships into

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smaller fragments - all of this comes together to form a syndrome that works to depoliticize public communication (Habermas, 1996, 377)."

In a footnote, Habermas does observe that this argument is "primarily true of electronic media, which are most frequently used by a broad public; it must be qualified for newspapers and other media (Habermas, 1996, 537 - n. 67)." Still, other critics, such as Postman, have argued that the influence of television in "presenting news to us packaged as vaudeville" induces other media to follow suit in their presentation of "news" (Postman, 1985, 111). The result of this process are papers such as U.S.A. Today that are modelled specifically on the formats developed in television. Ionescu observes that another response by the traditional newspaper press to the encroachment of television is the sensationalism of the so-called "tabloid" press (Ionescu, 1993, 230 - 231). The eminence and influence of television in both the media structure and the lives of the citizenry are thought to vitiate the presentation and discussion of serious matters. This is because television is viewed, by some, as primarily a medium of *entertainment* whose purpose is to distract and amuse rather than to inform and instruct (Ionescu, 1993, 229). For critics such as Postman television poses a threat to democracy because it makes "entertainment itself the natural format for representation of all experience. ... The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining, which is another issue altogether (Postman, 1985, 87)(10)." The public space has long been viewed as an honoured location that is not to be cheapened (Miller, 1993, 138). The public sphere is cheapened and its currency made base when it becomes a realm of spectacle and fiction(11).

However, depictions of the current public sphere as a *managed show* consisting of mostly sensationalism and spectacle conceal as much as they reveal about the reality of the contemporary media-sphere. There is no justification for claiming that one particular type of content, or one particular type of readership, is

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the absolute standard by which each and every aspect of the media is to be judged (Sparks, 1991, 62). The media and their products cannot be treated as a single unified category: the media is a multi-service and product supplier of a variety of cultural goods and products in a number of different forms and formats such as books, magazines, newspapers, television shows, music, movies and much more. Each and every one of these products are unique and complex in their internal structure and their relationship to their audiences: each fulfils a particular kind of role for their particular segment of the public in terms of their content and utility. Furthermore, the *communication* conveyed by the media in these products is differentiated in terms of its utility, level and degree of information: an issue will be subject to differing degrees of analysis and coverage in popular forums like television talk shows, news programs versus the kind of coverage found in forums like *The New York Times*. That is to say, there are a number of media products that devote much more attention and analysis to public issues and matters of state than to the peccadillos of celebrities, consumer trends or sport. The impact and influence of television is not such that it can reduce the amount of political and economic information, opinion and analysis contained in media products that respond to the particular needs and demands of their audience(s). This is not to suggest that the potential consequences and impact of the preponderance of *sensationalist* and *trivial* information circulating within the media-sphere is somehow minimized or transcended. Rather, it is an attempt to intimate that the situation in regard to the *health* of the public sphere may not be as dire as is usually put forward as the case.

As well, it must be noted, that the manner in which the audience appropriates the cultural and informational material supplied to it goes some way in softening the bleakness of the picture of depoliticization. The research on effects and reception has provided a more nuanced portrait of the public-as-audience than the once prevalent image of them as "cultural dopes" who passively absorb and uncritically consume whatever passes in front of their glazed and dazed eyes (Habermas, 1996, 377).

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Strategies of interpretation utilized by media consumers are quite varied and are not necessarily in sync with those of media producers who can control, to some extent, what is provided but not how it is used. While the producers control the discourse conveyed to the recipients, they do not control the communicative context: the settings in which the recipient listens or views, is beyond the control of the producers (Scannell, 1989, 149). For example, Scannell notes that when "(Lord) Reith proposed, in 1923, that the infant BBC should be allowed to relay live the marriage service of the Duke of York and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Dean of Westminster refused for fear that men in public houses would listen with their hats on (***Ibid.***)." The act of appropriation remains an instance of individual choice. Yet the political potency, impact and relevance of such responses need to be kept in perspective. John Fiske describes the process whereby clothing manufacturers started to market pre-torn jeans in response to a seemingly emerging "style" (see Fiske, 1989, pp. 1 - 21). Fiske suggests that in appropriating these products, people found new ways to tear or disfigure their jeans, rather than accept the mass-marketed factory versions. While such an instance speaks well of individual expression in the face of a commercial juggernaut, it hardly constitutes a decisive blow for a healthy and critical public sphere. Instead of a rational-critical dialogue about general interests that is accessible to all, in this instance the public constitutes itself through private consumer expression and appropriation.

At the same time, broadening the definition of the political to include personal acts of appropriation does not answer or quell anxieties about the state of political discourse and participation, as much as it sidesteps - however adeptly - them. Admittedly, politics can and does involve a lot more than questions about the direction of the state. In this light, the literature generated in the field known as "cultural studies" has proven most instructive, if not, illuminating(**12**). However, arguments for extending the definition of the site of political struggle can be over-stretched. For instance, at the beginning of his book <u>Power Plays, Power Works</u>

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Fiske relates the reaction of some "fifteen or twenty" homeless men in a shelter watching the movie *Die Hard*. Fiske describes this particular film as showing "a variety of forms of social power in conflict with challenges from apparently weaker opponents." Fiske emphasizes the degree to which this audience "sided with the weaker party and took pleasure in any tactical victories won, however temporarily." In particular, he singles out their enthusiastic response to the depiction of the execution-style killing of a CEO and the destruction of an armoured police vehicle similar to that used by the "real" Los Angeles Police Department to smash into suspected crack houses. Finally, he notes that the men stop watching the film half-way through the hero's final battle with the villains, when it is obvious that their defeat is both inevitable and will mean the restoration of law and order (Fiske, 1993, 3 - 5). Fiske then goes on to inform the reader that he begins his book with this story because he sees it as an instance in which traditional political arenas, like the voting booth or legislative bodies, have been displaced as the key sites of political action. Furthermore, he argues that low involvement in any form of "traditional" political activity is not a sign of apathy but rather an indication that many of the struggles of everyday life occur in arenas that traditional politics have been slow to recognize (Fiske, 1993, 6). Far from being apathetic, Fiske feels that there is a "surging vitality, energy and creativity" at work in America in areas that lie beyond the domain of traditional politics. Nevertheless, while politics may very well consist of more than those actions specifically directed at determining the policy of the state, it is also irreducibly centred upon this struggle. Any theory that proclaims and eulogizes the politicization of the apolitical at the expense of the apparent depoliticization of the political restricts itself to the horizons set by the existing order (Sparks, 1988, 215). The reach and scope of politics becomes, in both conception and execution, significantly circumscribed.

Present within concerns about the seeming encroachment of "tabloidization" and "infotainment" in the media is a great deal of apprehension about the type of

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political involvement that will be cultivated by a public sphere commandeered by insiders and entertainers. The core question is that "if political life is constituted through its immersion in a media-dominated world it is critical to ask whether the viewer is a member of the public (a citizen), or part of a mass audience (a consumer) (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, 4)?" Subject to the cynical aims and intentions of commercial media, the public sphere is filled with images and words that lend themselves more to passive spectatorship rather than genuine public debate. As well, it is strongly asserted that mass media - especially the electronic media - create the impression of *involvement* in mediated events without providing the actuality of *participation* (Hart, 1994; see also Sennett, 1978). After all, as Habermas notes "mass culture has earned its rather dubious name precisely by achieving increased sales by adapting to the need for relaxation and entertainment on the part of the consumer strata with relatively little education, rather than through the guidance of an enlarged public toward the appreciation of a culture undamaged in its substance (Habermas, 1989a, 165)." Underlying such sentiments is the belief that the introduction of elements associated with "popular" entertainment produces a gradual disenfranchisement of ordinary people from the political process (Hart, 1994). In attempting to make news and information shorter, more accessible and more exciting, the media removes much of the "reality" or "life" that they contain making it easier for people to disengage and distance themselves from this information (Anderson et al., 1994, 7). While entertainment only demands that the audience watch or listen as they see fit, public dialogue requires effort and exertion on the part of participants in order to realize its rewards. In this manner, diversion and amusement are relatively addictive and made more so if one considers the pressures of career and family faced and navigated by the audience on a daily and ongoing basis. But, as Galston notes a public "that demands constant entertainment is by that very fact debarred from meaningful participation in the serious business of democratic self-government. But this we already knew from the Roman historians: bread and circuses was the motto not of the republic but of the empire (Galston, 1993, 251)."

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These fears are further intensified by the manner in which political communication and discourse has adapted itself to the perceived requirements of commercial media. The idiosyncratic characteristics of media such as television are believed to constrain and determine the type of coverage provided (Lichtenberg, 1990a, 103). As well, television's influence is also thought to extend to the manner in which political campaigns, electoral or otherwise, are conducted. Under the increasingly dominant direction of an emergent elite of political professionals (pollsters, media consultants, etc) political appearances, rhetoric and campaigning have been adapted to the presumed requirements of the dominant medium – television (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 208). Political rulers and leaders have always had to consider and construct their image and presentation before those who are, and would be, their subjects. If anything, Machiavelli's The Prince is, among other things, a primer on how a ruler can achieve and maintain their hold on governmental power through action as well as the perception of this action by both rivals and their subject population. However, modern developments in communications have fundamentally altered the rules by which this management of visibility is practised and conceived (Thompson, 1995, 135). Television reports of public speeches or appearances by politicians acquire an amplified sensation of immediacy when experienced, seemingly directly, through the auspices of electronic media as compared with their indirect digestion through second-hand accounts relayed through other media such as print. As Davis notes, television, unlike film or print, "can connect viewers to events unfolding directly before them. Captured on videotape, which instantly plays back what it records - unlike film or print, once more - the viewer is in touch with the apparent *Real*, virtually as if he had experienced it himself (Davis, 1993, 22 - emphasis in original)."

Two distinct consequences ensue from the augmented sense of public visibility fostered by electronic media. First, through the mediation of television aspects such as voice inflection, slips of the tongue, facial expressions, nervousness

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and evasiveness in responding to a question are conveyed for all to see, partially diminishing the degree of control that the politician may have over the "tone" or "shape" of their discursive verbal messages. Viewers have access to both the contents of a speaker's message as well as the way this message was/is delivered. Alongside the message that they want to disseminate, politicians are also imparting something of their personal "style"; matters of style can complement and bolster a politician's message but may, on occasion, overwhelm and overshadow what they are trying to say. This heightened exposure can act either as a wellspring of puissance or as a nagging, if not constant, source of trouble. As well, it is something of a necessary evil. Thompson notes that "the careful presentation of self before distant others whose allegiance must be constantly nourished, and whose support is vitally required from time to time, is not so much an option as an imperative for actual or aspiring political leaders and their parties. In the social and political conditions of the late twentieth century, politicians in liberal-democratic societies have little choice but to submit to the law of compulsory visibility (Thompson, 1995, 137)."

Secondly, as political competition has immersed and adapted itself to the technology and logic of the media, the perceived need to cultivate a "style" and "image" congenial to "televisual" practices and values has resulted in the emergence of a thriving and often controversial industry devoted to the management of visibility. The subsequent "professionalization of publicity" is believed to have introduced a new set of goals and objectives, orientated towards conveying and "selling" a certain image in the pursuit of either electoral victory or issue definition, into political campaigning. Alongside the predominance of television as a source of information and communication, this trend is generally thought responsible for the evacuation of policy and politically educative goals from the realm of political competition and public discourse. Instead, it is seen to encourage data-driven campaigns, based on the increased use of public opinion polling, survey research, and focus group exercises to discover voter's perceptions, moods, needs and desires and their ratings

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of rival candidates, parties and leaders (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, 208).

The management of visibility through the media is an unavoidable though highly contentious part of contemporary political practice since the potential exists for either benefit or damage to be reaped every time the candidate steps out before the floodlights. On the plus side, such enhanced visibility is thought to establish a closer "bond" between public figures and the larger public. On the negative side, this type of exposure, through its powers of magnification and amplification, tends to ascribe a highly disproportionate degree of importance to gaffes and outbursts. As Thompson observes, "gaffes arise when leaders are not in command of the situation in which they find themselves or the material with which they are dealing; outbursts arise when leaders are not in control of themselves (Thompson, 1995, 142)." Furthermore, journalists, and subsequently the public frequently interpret such lapses as significant indications or revelations about a politician's ability and character. To the extent that they are departures from the prepared "script", they are construed as being a more real representation of the politician in question. Within the literature a varied and myriad omnium gatherum of anecdotes are summoned forth as examples of the positive or negative impact of this compulsory law of visibility. However, the presidential career of Ronald Reagan may be cited as an interesting and uniquely simultaneous example of both qualities. On the one hand, Reagan's personal popularity and "charm" as a communicator are often invoked as central reasons for his electoral success and the apparent acceptance of his political agenda amongst the general populace. For instance, within press and administration circles, Reagan was often referred to and acknowledged as the "Great Communicator" (Schudson & King, 1995, 133). On the other hand, Reagan's predilection for gaffes in uncontrolled and unscripted exchanges with the press or in front of a "open" microphone are similarly invoked as instances when the process of managed visibility broke down. Indeed, it was a foreknowledge of such a penchant that prompted Reagan's "public relations" team - Michael Deaver and David Gergen - to create a "Public Relations" strategy in

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which the president remained visible to and in contact with the public but largely inaccessible to "spontaneous" interaction with the press.

Although it is frequently asserted that Reagan, by means of his personal charisma, had established some kind of special rapport with the American public, such a conclusion appears to have little in the way of solid factual support beyond the claims advanced through isolated anecdotal and impressionistic accounts. In point of fact, polls measuring Reagan's public approval indicate that, compared to his presidential predecessors, he had the lowest average approval rating for the first two years of his administration. Interestingly enough, these were the very same years that the lore of his abilities as the "Great Communicator" was first voiced and formulated (***Op. Cit.***, 1995, 134). In a stimulating analysis of the apparent discrepancy between Reagan's image as the "Great Communicator" and the documented reality of his polling data through two terms in office, Schudson and King attribute the prevailing iconography surrounding Reagan to a variety of factors. The five more prominent factors believed to be at work were: "(1) Reagan's skills and the skills of his staff in communicating personally to the press corps and the Congress; (2) a changed political balance of power in Washington after the election of 1980 and a concerted effort to take advantage of this; (3) Reagan's ability to mobilize a key right-wing constituency; (4) the tendency of the press to defer to legislative success and to read it as popularity; and (5) the exaggerated importance that the mass media and Washington insiders attribute to the role of television in shaping public opinion - and to 'public opinion' itself (***Op. Cit.***, 1995, 140)."

In spite the spate of innovations which have occurred within the field of mass communications, the escalating immersion of political life in a media-dominated world is generally **not** seen to be something which has served to enhance or increase the possibility of truly democratic communication. Any expectation that the media would enhance and extend "the conversation of democracy" is seen by critics to be

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ill served by the operation of the media as a private business and its consequences. Hoynes, for example, argues that "democratic discourse is not advanced by mass media systems that cater to the interests of their financial patrons and produce programs to attract a mass audience of potential customers (Hoynes, 1994, 157)." In addition to undermining the ability of the media as conveyors of democratic values and information this operation of the media as a business also fundamentally alters the nature of the public sphere and citizens' participation in it. The influence and permeation of the values of "the market-oriented system of provision" results in a public sphere that does little to cultivate individuals as an active citizenry. The media, the primary mechanism of the public sphere, do not operate as a common carrier for civic discourse, a medium for conversation among citizens, but instead act as an instrument which conveys both product to consumers as well as markets to producers (Anderson et al, 1994). Individuals are addressed primarily through their identity as consumers rather than as citizens (Murdock & Golding, 1989, 192). In so doing, the media de-emphasizes these other identities. Individuals participate in the public sphere as members of the market, an arena in which collective activity is overshadowed by the whims of privatized consumer existence (Murdock, 1992, 19). The identities of citizens are internally fractured. Attitudes and behaviour required of individuals by the economic realm negate those cultivated by the political one.

Moreover political discourse itself is no longer concerned with the evaluation of priorities or choosing between desirable but contradictory ends within various political programs. Colonized by commercial speech and the logic of consumerism, political discourse becomes a matter of single issues that can be packaged in easily consumable and sellable form, like soap powder or soft drinks. Accordingly any response by the individual, "like that of the decision to purchase, is a simple and immediate yes or no, not the 'just a moment' of debate (Garnham, 1986, 48)." The freedom to choose between competing products, be they daily cleansers or electoral promises, is presented as the central and defining liberty of the modern age

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(Murdock & Golding, 1989, 192). The implied reader is treated as a consumer in the political supermarket, "someone with the time, interest and attention to comparison shop, to read the lists of ingredients on each package, to check the store's information on unit pricing, to attend to advertising as a form of information while learning to discount it as a type of propaganda (Schudson, 1995, 10)." As opposed to being involved in society as political citizens of nation states people are involved as consumption units in a corporate world (Elliott, 1982, 244). The public is transformed from participants in political and cultural debates into consumers of media images and information (Kellner, 1990, 12). The public sphere functions not as a realm for critical cultural actors but instead as one of culture consumers that passively absorb and consume the information and images placed in front of them in dizzying succession. In light of the perceived state of current affairs, the average individual's diet of civic communication is thought to be capable only of causing their gradual asphyxiation as effective and participating citizens.

By and large, the consensus is that there is much that the media could do to improve its conventional function of providing citizens with the body and quality of information to enable them to gain a sufficient understanding of politics and to participate effectively in political life (Schudson, 1995, 214). Consequently, a variety of proposals aimed at improving the media's execution of its "conventional function" can be found throughout the literature. Most of these suggestions have been attempts, in one way or another, to address and deal with the "tensions and disparities between the ostensibly democratic ideals that the mass media are supposed to serve and the communication structures and practices that actually prevail (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1990, 269 - 270)." A number of these proposals involve a concerted effort to distance the mass media from the pressure of the market, particularly in those areas associated with 'news' and the discussion of public issues. For example, John Thompson has proposed that a more appropriate institutional framework for the development of media industries than that of the traditional liberal model of a free

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press is to be found in the *principle of regulated pluralism* (see Thompson, 1990, pp. 260 - 264 & 1995, pp. 240 - 243). Regulated pluralism endeavours to establish an institutional configuration that accommodates and secures the existence of a plurality of independent media organizations (Thompson, 1995, 240). To achieve this goal, the principle of regulated pluralism calls for a de-concentration of resources in media industries: legislative intervention would be utilized so as to enable the development of media organizations which are not part of large conglomerates. In addition to such measures the principle requires a clear separation of media institutions from the exercise of state power. The twin aspects of this principle create, in Thompson's view, an intentionally broad institutional space for media organizations between the market and the state.

As well, some have called for the reinvigoration of the public service model of the media(13). For example, John Keane in The Media and Democracy sketches a redefinition of the public service model which involves a "maximum feasible *decommodification* and 're-embedding' of communications media in the social life of civil society" (Keane, 1991, 153). This would involve a "tighter" regulation of private corporate power over the means of communication through stronger public or state intervention in the market. "Public regulation of the market should seek the creation of a genuine variety of media which enable little people in big societies to send and receive a variety of opinions (Keane, 1991, 155)." To further such aims, Keane proposes the development of a genuine plurality of non-market-non-state media - "that is, publicly funded and legally guaranteed media institutions of civil society (Keane, 1989, 50)." Such a plurality of media best serves, in Keane's view, the functioning of the media as thorns in the side of political power and as a primary means for citizens to communicate with each other (Keane, 1991, 150).

Finally, there have been a number of proposals aimed at remedying the deficient performance of journalism in terms of its ascribed democratic duty of

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sustaining and cultivating a reasoned discussion of ideas and policies. For example, in the last few years a movement of sorts, sometimes called civic or public journalism, has emerged in the United States (see Fishkin, 1995, 156 - 160; Hackett & Zhao, 1998, 200 - 206; Rosen, 1991 & 1996). It started in 1988 when, in reaction to the presidential campaign of that year and its coverage, editor Davis Merritt of the *Wichita Eagle* urged journalists to begin focussing on issues that citizens really cared about as opposed to those that the politicians wanted to speak about. In 1990, *Washington Post* columnist David Broder echoed this concern and called on journalists to become activists on behalf of the process of self-government (Schudson, 1998, 133). Soon afterwards, the "movement" began to pick up steam with the establishment of both the Project on Public Life and the Press and the Pew Center for Civic Journalism (***Ibid.***). The efforts of this movement are directed towards creating a more active and engaged public by self-consciously giving voice to the people's agenda (Fishkin, 1995, 156).

This movement has few, if any, guidelines about the specific means by which their goals are to be achieved. Overall, public journalism has tended to define itself more as an attitude than as encompassing a particular technique or program (Hackett & Zhao, 1998, 201). A central ingredient within this perspective is that journalists should stop thinking about the public as spectators who are to be "informed" about the various goings on in the world of politics. Instead, they should try to conceive of and treat them as participants: they need to adopt strategies of reportage that are more attuned to the requirements of public discussion (Rosen, 1991, 281). Besides raising public consciousness about various issues, journalists should aid the public in "working through" community problems by helping them to identify the root causes of these problems, the implications, and the "core values" at stake (Hackett & Zhao, ***Ibid.***). Nevertheless, the effort on the part of public journalism to reawaken the media to their larger democratic function as the servant of a public discussion is not without its critics or problems (see Hackett & Zhao, 1998, 204 - 206; Schudson,

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1998).

Despite the shortcomings of the media's performance in meeting the democratic expectations placed in it, the articulation and dissemination of critical public opinion is still held to be a vital feature of modern democracy. Within the literature, the media's ability to perform a beneficial democratic function is wrapped up in questions of how the media are - and should be - organized (Curran, 1996, 81). To wit, the media's inability to meet the democratic expectations placed upon them is usually attributed to their simultaneous existence as both a private commercial entity and a public political one. The influence and pressure exerted by the commercial orientation of the media is thought to undermine the media's performance of their civic functions. Consequently, the resolution of this ambivalence and its undercutting of democratic aspirations in the field of mass communications are thought to lie in two very general areas. The first of these involves some form of alteration to the patterns of ownership under which the media currently operate. The second of these propose some reform of the current professional practice of journalism in relation to the political and social realm. However, besides the difficulties presented by matters of the media's organization, orientation and operation, the media's vacillation in regard to democratic expectations and values is also due to the way in which their role is conceived. That is, the expectations placed upon the media are in themselves ambiguous and not readily translated into straightforward or easily accomplished tasks. This is not a matter that applies solely to the Habermasian literature: a sense of vagueness in the conception of the media's political role is also present in arguments made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A longstanding problem for explorations of the democratic role of the media is that the content or substance of that role is frequently presented as if it was inviolable and above suspicion. The next chapter will argue that the aura of ambivalence that hovers about the democratic role of the media can also be attributed to the manner in which this role is defined and construed in what

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might be called the "classic" literature. As a result, it will demonstrate that an additional difficulty for the media lies in the very substance of the political tasks they are assigned.

Endnotes

1. For example, the argument that capitalism is compatible with liberal democracy and responsible for its pretensions to self-governance can be found in Macpherson, 1965 & 1977.

2. This scenario is especially true in the case of Public radio and television. "Publicly owned radio and television stations are routinely required by legislation to encourage unity in the sovereign states that fund them. They are there to perform a variety of functions simultaneously, some of which paradoxically involve both responsiveness to taste and its formation. Public service broadcasting is meant to shape as it tames as it delivers. It is expected to manufacture citizens (citizens who have contributed to their own creation) even as it attracts an audience (Miller, 1993, 133)." Governments are not the only ones who expect such deeds of publicly funded media, as the same type of expectations, implicitly or explicitly expressed, also appear in the literature on public broadcasting (for example, see Aufderheide, 1991; Hoynes, 1994; Keane, 1991; Kellner, 1990).

3. In some countries, such as Canada and Great Britain there exist, in the field of broadcasting, radio and television stations that are publicly owned. However, such stations tend not to be the sole broadcasting outlets available to the public but exist and operate alongside a great multiplicity of privately owned stations.

4. The reach and scope of these multi-national conglomerates, in terms of their geographic dispersal and media convergence, is truly staggering. "The most far-flung is Murdoch's News Corporation which controls a newspaper empire stretching east-west from Boston to Budapest and north-south from London to Queensland, an extended magazine and book empire incorporating Harper Collins, and a TV and film empire including Fox TV and Twentieth Century Fox in the USA, British Sky Broadcasting in northern Europe, and Star TV in Asia. To this has been added joint ventures with Telstra, the Australian telecommunications company and MCI, the second largest, long-distance telephone operator in the US, for the development of on-line and interactive services (Curran, 1996, 93)."

5. This is especially the case with the medium of television, particularly in North

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America, where an individual only needs to possess a television set to watch television programs for "free", albeit from a limited number of channels. The individual can opt to buy "channel packages" from their local cable company or subscribe to some form of satellite service, but even then this type of financial outlay does not generate much revenue for television networks. Networks make their money through the sales of "commercial spots" during the broadcast of various programs. The price of these 'spots' varies with the size and type of potential audience that the networks can create for the advertiser's commercials. A program that garners high ratings can sell space for a premium price since, in theory, such programs attract larger audiences. For a critical examination of the ratings system utilized by the networks and assumptions underpinning it see Davis, 1993.

6. Curran notes that "this is true to a lesser extent of commercial television because programmes select and deliver audiences with less precision that press publications. However, advertisers still distort television because they tend to reward high ratings rather than intensity of audience demand. This generates strong pressure on general interest channels to aim for middle market and to conform to middle market values and perspectives (Curran, 1991b, 96)."

7. Critical examinations and reviews of this "regime of objectivity", in terms of its historical development and implications for democratic practice can be found in Hackett & Zhao, 1998 as well as Schudson, 1978. Additional examinations and considerations of the wealth of issues and consequences involved in the attempt to realize "objectivity" can be found in Alger, 1996 – especially chapter 6; Anderson et al., 1994; Bennett, 1988 – especially chapter 3; Entman, 1989; Hart, 1994; Lichtenberg, 1996; Schudson, 1995. An interesting discussion examining the issue from the perspective of critical theory can be found in Hallin, 1985.

8. Hallin notes that after the slow and drawn-out demise of the partisan press, there was a period in which the press was nonpartisan but nevertheless still quite activist in relation to social and political issues. During this period, the press tended to present itself "as a defender not of a partisan viewpoint but of "the public good" in general, and crusading for everything from municipal reform to war with Spain. The great muckrackers of the progressive era belonged to this period, as did the sensationalism of Pulitzer and Hearst (Hallin, 1985, 129). Both Leonard, 1986 & Schudson, 1978 provide an interesting historical perspective and analysis of the so-called "muckracker" period. Leonard, in particular, draws some stimulating conclusions about the impact that progressive ideas about the role and function of the press may have actually had on political involvement and participation by the greater public. Further discussion of "progressivism" and its historical legacy in the field of communication studies can be found in Sproule, 1997.

9. Edelman goes on to note that: "Most experiences that make life joyful, poignant,

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boring or worrisome are not part of the news: the grounds for personal concern, frustration, encouragement and hope; the conditions that matter at work, at home, and with friends; the events people touch, as distinct from those that are 'reported'; the experience of financial distress or of opulence; children in trouble; lovers; alienating or gratifying jobs (Edelman, 1988, 35)."

10. Instances and examples of this "tabloidization" (Ionescu, 1993) are legion. However, a case could be made that in the trend towards "cotton candy journalism", "the prototypical example of this is *USA Today*, the paper that is sold in a coin box that looks like a television set. This is no accident. From concept to execution, *USA Today* is meant to be as close as possible to a television-watching experience. On the positive side, this has meant an imaginative use of color and graphics, quick and bright writing, features tailored to people's leisure and cultural interests. On the negative side, however, *USA Today* stresses the superficial, glorifies the trivial, oversimplifies the complex, and panders to a certain perceived need among Americans to feel good about themselves (Risser, 1995, 108)." A similar conclusion about the respective merits, or lack thereof, of the editorial and typographic qualities embodied by *USA Today* can be found in Postman, 1985.

11. Such a viewpoint characterizes a great deal of the literature on television and the media. Besides Postman, similar and related arguments can be found in Jerry Mander's Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, Richard Sennett's The Fall of Public Man, John Phelan's Mediaworld: Programming the Public and a host of others.

12. A critical and historical overview of the development and issues involved in this field can be found in Inglis, 1993.

13. In a footnote in The Media and Modernity Thompson differentiates his notion of regulated pluralism from Keane's 'revised public service model of communications'. For Thompson the central problem with Keane's argument is that "it presupposes too strong an opposition between pluralism, on the one hand, and commodity production and exchange, on the other. The cultivation of pluralism may require one to regulate the media industries in various ways, but it does not follow that media organizations can contribute to a 'genuinely pluralist' culture only if they are 'post-capitalist' in some sense (Thompson, 1995, 294 n. 8)." In the text, Thompson doubts the desirability of trying to prescribe meticulously the most appropriate forms of organization for the media industry (p. 242). As he notes, the form of ownership is not a reliable indicator of the type of content that will result. Therefore, he feels that for the purposes of cultivating diversity it is best to allow for a variety of organizational forms.

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Chapter Four:

The Ambivalence Within

> *There are papers of business, papers of advertisement, papers of sport, papers of opinion, and papers of power. It takes all sorts to make up a world, and there is much diversity in journalists as in members of Parliament. But all of them go together to make the Fourth Estate, which is becoming more powerful than all the other estates of the realm. Great is the power of the printed word. This, as Victor Hugo's hero says in 'Notre Dame', pointing first to the printed page and then to the soaring towers of the great cathedral; - "This will destroy that." Notre Dame has survived Caxton for many centuries and Parliament will continue to meet in the midst of a newspaper age, but it will be subordinate. The wielders of real power will be those who are nearest the people.*
>
> W. T. Stead, "Government by Journalism"

Marx maintains somewhere that the traditions of the past weigh heavily on the beliefs of the living. This observation aptly captures the veritable Gordian knot to be found deep within Habermasian discussions of the political role of the media. On the one hand, encountering the apparently eviscerated and dwindling public life of the present, this literature turns to the rich conceptual history readily accessible in prior political discourse on the role of the media. In the writings of thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill the free expression of opinion through the organs of an independent press is viewed as a principal means by which a diversity of viewpoints can be expressed, an enlightened public opinion formed, and the abuse of state power checked (Thompson, 1995, 238). Embodied within these arguments is a powerful and compelling vision of both democratic society and the role of the media in the furtherance of a public life independent of state power.

On the other hand, in returning to the resonant philosophical discourse of the past, the Habermasian literature runs the risk of courting incommensurability if it

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uncritically grafts the singular conceptual horizons of these arguments onto present circumstances. The environs of the twentieth century are clearly very different, in a variety of ways, from those of nineteenth century England. As Thompson notes: "Just as traditional liberal theory underestimated the dangers that would stem from the dependence of media institutions on a highly competitive process of capitalist accumulation, so too the early liberal thinkers did not anticipate the extent to which the autonomy and sovereignty of particular nation-states would be limited by the development of transnational networks of power and by the activities and policies of institutions which operate increasingly on a global scale (***Op. Cit.***, 240)." For this reason, the traditional theory of the political role of the media needs to be modified substantially if it is to be transposed successfully to the present.

The philosophical discourse about the 'liberty of the press' forged in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century has left an enduring stamp on contemporary understandings of the media's role in a democratic society. Unfortunately, the theoretical ambiguities of this legacy and the values contained within it have not been subject to as much detailed attention or discussion as they necessarily should have by either Habermas or those inspired by his model. Residing at the core of these arguments is a vision of democracy and the media's relationship with it based upon several problematic, conflicting assumptions and conceptual silences. Beyond the need of modernizing the historically outmoded aspects of the "classical" or traditional model, there is still the presence of underlying *internal* problems with its perception and construction of the political role played by the media. It is in the conceptualization of the relationship between the media and the political process, and the ways in which it is to be established, that an additional layer of ambivalence is located.

Given the generally uncritical imputation to the media of a central role in the advancement and protection of the liberty of citizens, this vacillation persists

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unacknowledged and unconsidered. This chapter will illuminate the incongruities located in understandings of the various duties and functions assigned to the media as a political entity. In doing so, it will show that there exists some difficulty for the media in regard to the manner that their assigned political tasks are conceived and understood. That is, conceptions of the role to be played by the media are based upon unexamined assumptions that are, ultimately, paradoxical and, at times, self-contradictory. The following discussion will investigate the theoretical picture of the media as the "fourth estate" and how this conception is ultimately equivocal in relation to the democratic expectations and aspirations ascribed to the media. The next chapter will, in turn, examine the vision of democratic politics - as embodied in the concept of the public sphere - that serves, for Habermas and those inspired by his model, as the ideal that the proper functioning of the media is to secure and sustain.

Overlooked in the story of the media's growing incorporation into the economic structure is the existence of internal inconsistencies within the expectations about the media's democratic role that also complicate and obfuscate the media's ability to perform as desired in the political realm. Consequently, discussion of the media and their political role needs to consider conceptions of what the media **ought** to be doing as well as questions of how they should be **organized** to do so. The process of returning to first principles and rethinking the democratic role of the media raises several questions about the adequacy and coherence of the Habermasian definition given to this role. The main difficulty in returning to first principles is that classic liberal theories of the media have been advanced so often that their central arguments seem almost wearisomely familiar (Curran, 1991a, 27). Invocation of their main postulates is undertaken usually more as part of a ritual rather than as an exercise of theoretical development and exposition. However, a careful and critical examination of these theories sheds an interesting light upon understandings of the media's role and function.

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In the ideal world of traditional "liberal" theory the media would act as a tie between public opinion and the governing institutions of the country. While contemporary scholars have been suspicious of the notion of public opinion as well as deeply divided over its definition(1), advocates of a "free press" were quite confident as to what it was and how it might be expressed (Boyce, 1978, 21). Bentham, for instance, defined public opinion "as a system of law emanating from the body of the people. ... To the pernicious exercise of the power of government it is the only check; to the beneficial an indispensable supplement. Able rulers lead it; prudent rulers lead or follow it; foolish rulers disregard it (Bentham, 1843b, 158)." In the Securities Against Misrule adapted to a Mohammedan State and The Constitutional Code, he delineated the nature and functions of what he called the "public opinion tribunal". In the introduction to the Code he declares that "to a representative democracy this unofficial, unpaid, and incorruptible judicatory is an instrument of support; and in regard to it, the object and endeavour will be to maximize the rectitude of decisions given by it. ... To every other form of government, it is by correspondent causes rendered an object of terror and anxiety, though the magnitude of its power is universally acknowledged among them (***Op. Cit.***, 43)." The positive or negative sanction of public opinion was seen as an important remedy against misrule: at heart, the basis of government was held to be the opinion of the public. Moreover, the administration of government was conceived as the attendance of "the trustees of the people upon the interest and affairs of the people (Trenchard & Gordon, 1971, 97)." Alexander Hamilton felt that "in the general course of things, the popular views and even prejudices will direct the actions of the rulers. All governments, even the most despotic, depend, in a great degree, on opinion. In free republics, it is most peculiarly the case: In these, the will of the people makes the essential principle of government; and the laws which control the community, receive their tone and spirit from the public wishes (Hamilton, 1987, 412)."

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Although invested with many important political and social qualities, the purplish prose used to describe public opinion does suggest that the concept often functioned more as a rhetorical device than as a carefully worked out idea (Peters, 1995, 13). In the context of eighteenth-century France, Baker argues that 'public opinion' took form "as a political or ideological construct, rather than as a discrete sociological referent (Baker, 1990, 172)." Correspondingly, while the philosophy of English Whig party founded the origin of government upon the consent of the people, those who appealed to the "power of the people" were cautiously imprecise in any description that they offered of the nature and composition of this entity. Most thinkers, Whig and Tory alike, were not favourably disposed towards any kind of political activity by the masses. In either case, "the people" was a term that, when specifically spelled out, only referred to a very slight fraction of the population: most articulate Englishmen had a fairly small proportion of the nation in mind when they made entreaties to "the people" (Gunn, 1983, 74)(2). More often than not, the power of "public opinion" owed as much to its strength as a persuasive symbol as an actual social force (Peters, 1995, 13).

Nevertheless, rhetorical or otherwise, appeals to the power or force of "public opinion" played a crucial part in the various struggles attempting to open government up to popular control during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. If anything, calls to the "rule of public opinion" implied an acceptance of an open, public politics and a corresponding new system of authority based on rational consensus. In this context, Montesquieu's reflections on the nature of English political life seem especially suggestive (Baker, 1990, 197). Montesquieu contended that "in a free nation it often does not matter whether individuals reason well or badly; it suffices that they reason; from that comes the liberty that protects them from the effects of these same reasoning. Similarly, in a despotic government, it is equally pernicious whether one reasons well or badly; it suffices that one reason to run counter to the principle of government (Montesquieu, 1989, 332)." Therefore, whether the public

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reasons poorly or adeptly is not as important as the fact that they reason and that this activity is accepted and seen as an element of the overall political structure. Public opinion offered an abstract court of appeal in which government and opposition competed to appeal to "the public" and to claim the judgement of "public opinion" on their own behalf (Baker, 1990, 172).

Even those who were sceptical of public opinion's beneficial value agreed that it was a phenomenon of great significance for public life (Boyce, 1978, 21). The newspaper press were believed to be the most important factor in the formation and propagation of public opinion. To Bentham the newspaper press presented themselves "as the efficient and the only efficient instrument. This instrument is no other than a Newspaper. ... In this instrument may be seen not only an appropriate organ of the Public Opinion tribunal, but the only regularly and constantly acting visible one (Bentham, 1843c, 579)." Likewise, Jefferson believed that the best way of guaranteeing that the "good sense" of the people prospered untainted by error was "to give them full information of their affairs thro' the channel of the public papers, and to contrive that those papers should penetrate the whole mass of the people. The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right (Jefferson, 1904, 253)." Curiously, while an "independent press" has been lionized as a sacred part of the American heritage, it played a very small part in the thought of the Founders (Schudson, 1997, 323). In The Federalist Papers, as Schudson observes, "the issue of a how a large nation - an 'extended republic' - could be sustained was very much in the minds of the framers as they constructed a governmental framework, but there is simply no mention of the role of print in reducing the deleterious effects of this distance (***Ibid.***)." That this is the case is all the more ironic since these writings about the danger of distance were first published as newspaper articles designed to win over the population to the ratification of the Constitution and, therefore, likely reached readers far beyond their point of origin(3). While The Federalist Papers are an example of the kind of role

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that the media could play in public deliberation, this was not an aspect that was immediately recognized or grasped.

Functioning as the "appropriate organ of the public opinion tribunal" in a democracy required that the press perform a number of vital tasks. To a large degree these tasks revolved around the functions of providing publicity as well as the dissemination of information. This aspect of the role of the press was adeptly delineated by James Mill in his essay "Liberty of the Press". For present purposes Mill's reasoning serves both as an ideal personification of the traditional arguments about the political role of the media as well as a sound basis from which to explore the ambiguities contained within this understanding. Foremost of these duties was that the press be able to freely convey the people's comments and criticisms of the government in power. Mill argued that "the discontent of the people is the only means of removing the defects of vicious governments". To this end, freedom of the press was "the main instrument of creating discontent" and was "in all civilized countries, among all but the advocates of misgovernment, regarded as an indispensable security, and the greatest safeguard of the interests of mankind (Mill, 1992, 116)." By acting as a mechanism of publicity, the press allowed citizens to acquire knowledge of their fellow citizens' dissatisfaction with the government. Citizens, Mill contends, are only able to get considerable ameliorations from their governments through resistance, by either employing physical force against their rulers, or, at least, by the threat of such that may frighten their rulers to implement the desired remedies and actions (***Op. Cit.***, 116 - 117). If actual or potential resistance is to have any effect or wield any kind of suasive power, it must emanate from a majority of the public. Attaining such a level of "generality", requires that there be a conformity of opinion, and a general knowledge of this conformity. Mill believes that this effect will be produced if the public has the capability to communicate their sentiments to one another: "Unless where the people can all meet in general assembly, there is no other means, known to the world, of attaining this

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object, to be compared with the freedom of the press (***Op. Cit.***, 117)."

Secondly, the ability and capacity of the public to criticize their governors, let alone choose them in the first place, was dependent on their having access to information. Mill believed that the foundation of a good choice in this instance depended upon access to accurate information. Accordingly, "the fuller and more perfect the knowledge, the better the chance, where all sinister interest is absent, of a good choice. How can the people receive the most perfect knowledge relative to the characters of those who present themselves to their choice, but by information conveyed freely, and without reserve, from one to another (***Op. Cit.***, 118)?" Furthermore, Mill argues that without knowledge of the manner in which their representatives exercise the powers entrusted to them, the people will be unable to profit by the power of electing them, and the advantages of good government will be unattainable, if not thwarted. Without the free and unrestrained use of the press, the required knowledge will be difficult to obtain (***Op. Cit.***, 119). In its transmission of the actions of government, Mill envisions the press operating as a vehicle by which this and other vital information is disseminated to the citizenry.

However, in making his arguments about the inherent advantages contained in the "free and unrestrained use of the press", Mill also depicts the press as being more than just a channel of opinion in a democracy. Mill deems that "an accurate report of what is done by each of the representatives, a transcript of his speeches, and a statement of his propositions and votes" is a necessary part of insuring that the public will be able to assess and appraise the conduct of the government. But beyond this, Mill concludes that "one thing more is necessary, and so necessary, that, if it is wanting, the other might as well be wanting also. The publication of the proceedings tells what is done. This, however, is useless, unless a correct judgement is passed upon what is done (***Op. Cit.***, 119)." To this end, it is imperative that the press provide some interpretation of the "raw information" they carry so that "a correct

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judgement is passed upon what is done." Moreover, it is evident that Mill places a great value upon this function since he views it as being "so necessary, that, if it is wanting, the other might as well be wanting also." That is, for a correct judgement to result, the information received by the public must be placed in a proper context so that it can be understood. Alongside the conveyance of information, the press need to instruct the people on how to weigh and balance the various details that are being provided. Without this element of instruction, the conveyance of information loses most of its allure and utility: without being interpreted and placed in context the information found in the press is delivered without a sense of proportion or significance.

On account of this, Mill envisages the role of the press as involving more than just the mere dissemination of "raw" information. Mill specifically stresses and singles out this aspect as an important element of his argument (***Op. Cit.***, 119). Consequently, he sets out to probe how the press can be made to contribute to the people's arrival at a correct judgement upon the conduct of their representatives. He concludes that what is needed is that all the people, or as many of them as possible, should endeavour to correctly assess the consequences of the acts proposed or done by their representatives. As well, in addition to having a knowledge of the acts proposed, the public "should know what acts might have been proposed, if the best were not proposed, from which better consequences would have followed (***Op. Cit.***, 120)." Mill envisions this goal as being "accomplished most effectually, if those who are sufficiently enlightened would point out to those who are in danger of mistakes, the true conclusions; and showing the weight of evidence to be in their favour, should obtain for them the universal assent (***Ibid.***)." Alongside supplying the material upon which the public will base its decisions and opinions, Mill understands the role of the press to be one of active participation in public debate and opinion formation. Beyond disseminating information, the press also serves the public interest by a dutiful attendance to and definition of this interest. Through the publication of

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information about both the acts done by government as well as advancing suggestions about alternatives to these policies and actions, and the potential benefit that might be accrued from them, the press reflects and actively defines public perceptions of the "common good". By such means the press nurtures and guides both the actual as well as the embryonic sense of what constitutes the "public interest": the press both lead and follow public sentiments on social and political matters. In this light, the press therefore act not just a channel of opinion, but become a guardian of it as well, correspondingly developing interests and ideas of their own (Boyce, 1978, 22).

That this is the case becomes more apparent when Mill considers the question of how "those who are sufficiently enlightened" to provide the direction and interpretation are to be chosen. Mill begins by admitting that there is no clear or demonstrable means by which wisdom is to be known, much less selected. This matter is further complicated by consideration of the question of who is to be trusted with making the choice about whom the instructors will be. As Mill notes, those whose judgement requires direction and tutorship are perhaps not the best judges of determining who should direct them. Similarly, if the government is assigned the task of making this selection, they will most likely select and employ individuals who will either act in conformity with their views and interests or be heavily biassed towards the preferences of the government. Given either of these scenarios, it is best that those who will guide the people be of an independent nature rather than risk their active facilitation of the government benefiting themselves through "the pillage and oppression of the people" (Mill, 1992, 120). In fact, Mill sees the imposition of any restraint by the government upon the freedom of the press as being tantamount to the government choosing the directors of the public mind. For this reason, he declares that "if any government chooses the directors of the public mind, that government is despotic (***Ibid.***)."

Mill contends that since there is no possible organ of choice, no overt choice

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should or can be made. Instead all censure and criticism of the government, both just and unjust alike, should be equally permitted. Since there is no safety in allowing any one group to authoritatively choose "the directors of the public mind", it is better that any one who pleases to do so be allowed to publish. Mill concludes that the best possible circumstance is one in which the conclusions and opinions of various individuals "should be openly adduced; and the power of comparison and choice should be granted to all. Where there is no motive to attach a man to error, it is natural to him to embrace the truth; especially if pains are taken to adapt the explanation to his capacity. ... When various conclusions are, with their evidence, presented with equal care and equal skill, there is a moral certainty, though some few may be misguided, that the greatest number will judge aright, and that the greatest force of evidence, wherever it is, will produce the greatest impression (***Op. Cit.***, 121)." The role of the press in this situation is that of advancing a combination of both information, interpretation and argumentation that individuals can then use to form - and inform - their own opinions. For a great many people, the newspaper press offer a convenient and time efficient means of keeping abreast of and having an opinion on developments within the circles of government.

However, in conceiving the role of the media - in the form of the newspaper press - as a guardian of opinion, Mill interpolates, albeit inadvertently, a degree of conceptual tension and ambiguity into his underlying understanding of the operation of public opinion. Principally, he simultaneously conceives the press as both an independent participant in "public discussion" as well as a neutral, "open" forum for debate to occur within. The media function as both an involved participant and a neutral observer in the tasks that he ascribes to them. That this is the case becomes evident by a brief review of the manner in which Mill presents his understanding of the role of the press. Initially, Mill argues that a "general conformity of opinion" is produced when the people are able to communicate their sentiments and opinions to one another: other than meeting in a "general assembly", Mill maintains that "there

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is no other means, known to the world, of attaining this object, to be compared with the freedom of the press (Mill, 1992, 117)." Accordingly, the press are, in his eyes, a means of extending and enlarging the temporal and spatial accessibility of public debate. In any event, this type of inference is not something that is exclusive to the thinking of Mill alone. His son, John Stuart Mill also views the press as a means of providing an equivalent to the physical conditions for the formation and propagation of public opinion like those found in the Athenian Pnyx and forum (Mill, 1972b, 193). In either instance, the press are conceived of as being a means by which to make debate "public" in the sense that all members of the public can participate, if they choose to do so or just monitor the proceedings. That is, debate and discussion conveyed through the media become "public" in that their contents are accessible and "visible" to the audiences of these media. In such understandings, the central role of the media in the political process is to create and sustain an open, public space in which debate and deliberation can be engaged in by all willing participants.

As the forum in which debate takes place the media are enlisted in the creation and perpetuation of an open, accessible space for public discussion. A key ingredient of the "openness" of this public space is that a great diversity of viewpoints and opinions can be placed in front of the public for their consideration. To this end, Mill asserts that "there is no safety to the people in allowing any body to choose opinions for them; that there are no marks by which it can be decided beforehand, what opinions are true and what are false; that there must, therefore, be equal freedom of declaring all opinions, both true and false; and that, when all opinions, true and false, are equally declared, the assent of the greater number, when their interests are not opposed to them, may always be expected to be given to be true (Mill, 1992, 122)(4)." The media provide the opportunity for discussion to go on both in and outside of the circles of government. The ability of the people to express their discontent in a open forum accessible to all the citizenry is, in Mill's mind, the main means of ensuring a critical vigilance over the actions of government.

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Furthermore, it permits all the knowledge that individuals in a society possess to be placed in the public eye. Through this process of public contestation, Mill argues that, "every thing which has the appearance of being knowledge, but is only a counterfeit of knowledge, is assayed and rejected" (***Op. Cit.***, 127).

However, Mill also envisions the media in the capacity of a guardian of opinion. In this role the media are entrusted with the task of not only providing the public with information about the actions of government, but also of assuring that the people "estimate correctly the consequences of the acts proposed or done by their representatives (***Op. Cit.***, 120)." To this end, Mill envisages the role of the press, or those "sufficiently enlightened" within it, as consisting of pointing out "to those who are in danger of mistakes the true conclusions" (***Ibid.***). But by doing this Mill confers conflicting interests upon the media in regards to their role. On the one hand, as the space in which public deliberation is carried out the duty of the press are to remain accessible and open to all participants. The media are an instrument through which public opinion is relayed to all those who read a newspaper. On the other hand, as the means by which the significance of political events is interpreted and weighed, the press acquire an entirely dissimilar and distinctive set of commitments and considerations. As well, the media become a participant in the debate as a consequence of their responsibility towards the facilitation of correct judgement being passed on what is done (***Op. Cit.***, 119).

In doing this, Mill confers a different set of interests and attitudes upon the media in regards to how they stand vis-a-vis public opinion compared to those they had when understood as a forum or space for debate. The designation of the media as the instrument by which "those who are in danger of mistakes" receive instruction and guidance bestows a distinct, differing orientation towards public debate than that which the media would have as a space in which said discussion occurs. Primarily, the media, in this capacity, take on a far more active role in the processing and

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presentation of information. As part of their role as "the directors of the public mind" the press not only transmits opinions, but also advances arguments and interpretations of their own. Although Mill argues that there is no possible means or mechanism by which a choice can be made about selecting "those who are sufficiently enlightened", newspaper editors need to make choices about what they will and will not print in their paper's pages. At the same time, given the conceptualization of the "acts" by which correct judgement is promoted, newspapers editors and writers need to actively interpret and analyse the actions of government so that they will be able to make suggestions about "what acts might have been proposed, if the best were not proposed, from which better consequences would have followed" (***Op. Cit.***, 120).

In this context, an editor's primary concern is not with the potential frustration of would-be speakers but with the quality of public discourse. For the newspaper what is important is not that everybody have a chance and opportunity to speak, but rather that everything worth saying shall be said. Or, at least, everything that they - as producers of a newspaper - deem to be worth saying and considering. Contrary to Mill's contention that there should be an "equal freedom of declaring all opinions, both true and false", the professional criterion implicit within the role he specifies for the media results in a circumscription of debate within, in this instance, the pages of a newspaper. In orienting themselves towards public debate in the manner suggested by Mill, each individual newspaper needs to make a conscious choice about which opinions and arguments it will highlight and which it will ignore. As a guardian or caretaker of public opinion the press needs to attend to the best interest - or what they perceives as such - of public discourse. Whereas, if they are to operate as a mere channel of opinion the press only need to provide a means and forum of expression for the public and basically leave the substance of any subsequent communication alone. While Mill argues that there is "nobody who can safely be permitted to judge" which censures are just and which unjust, editorial

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considerations necessitate that those involved in the production of a newspaper must make such judgements and choices on a daily basis.

At the time when Mill was writing the start up and maintenance costs involved in the production of a newspaper were relatively low. In these circumstances, a diversity of newspapers incorporating a wide-range of views and interests were available to the public (see Aspinall, 1949; Boyce, 1978; Curran, 1991a). Nevertheless, even when there are numerous newspapers within a locality each is, according to the criterion it deems appropriate, making choices about the selection and processing of information and opinion. The diversity of opinion that is being offered to the public and government is one that is being "processed" and edited by intermediaries. Direct expression by the public through the media is generally a rare and isolated experience. The voice of ordinary people, so to speak, only appears in a pure, "non-mediated" state in the letters page, or other such feedback mechanisms established and sanctioned by the editors and owners of a newspaper. Beyond this, if and when the people "speak", they do so through a layer of intervening and mediating agents: their voice, as it appears in newspapers, radio or television, is one which is essentially manufactured according to the dictates and needs of the medium and "product" being produced. The result of these workings is that the press no longer function as an "open" forum but instead become one voice, albeit a very powerful one, amongst the many. Furthermore, "public opinion" in the "organs of opinion", although disseminated in a "public" manner, is largely not expressed or formulated by the citizenry itself. Instead, the content and direction of "public opinion" is interpreted, defined and fashioned by a layer of intermediaries for the benefit, and in the interest of the public: "public opinion" and matters of political importance are revealed to the public in daily installments with each new edition.

Although he assigns the media a role in the fostering of the "correct judgement" of the public, Mill situates this role within a conception of the press as

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a means by which to extend the deliberation of a general assembly. Thus, Mill understands the function of the media as being that of both a space in which public debate can occur and as a means of instructing and coaching participants in this selfsame debate. Be that as it may, Mill's simultaneous conception of the media as both a channel **and** a guardian of public opinion results in an understanding of their role that is ultimately contradictory. This incongruity arises from the tension between the conflicting understandings of the press as both a forum for debate and as an independent actor within this process of deliberation. On the one hand, the media are viewed as a mechanism that acts on the behalf of the public interest through is direction and instruction of public opinion. To the extent that the media serve in this capacity they operate as a **representative** of the public. On the other hand, the media are also held to be a device by which spatially and temporally dispersed individuals can participate and be involved in an ongoing process of public deliberation. That is, the role of the media is construed as a means of providing **direct** participation in public debate and discussion. Moreover, the political potential of this space is conceived, by Mill and others, as being the equivalent to that of citizens physically gathering together in the *agora*, town hall or legislature.

A latent aspect of this idea is that the perceived function of the media is that of replicating, to the best of their abilities, the type of dialogical exchange and dynamics found in the face-to-face discussion of a group of people located within the same temporal and spatial location. Thus, the media's political goal is to imitate a form of political practice whose spatial and temporal ubiquitousness is transformed by their very introduction into this situation. That there is no direct acknowledgement or scrutiny of this facet is indicative of what John Keane identifies as the hidden 'classical' bias at work in the early modern view of the relationship between the media and liberty(**5**). Simply put, this conception of politics extrapolates its ideal of political deliberation from the face-to-face model of communication of the Greek *polis*. As a model, it supposes that in complex, modern societies all

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citizens could enter public life on basically equal terms; "that their freedom to express and publish their opinions would enable them to form themselves into a unified public body which would deliberate peacefully about matters of general concern (Keane, 1991, 39 - 40)."

Evidence of this underlying inclination is found scattered throughout many of the "classic" arguments made on the behalf of freedom of the press. It is especially apparent in the extent to which these thinkers make little or no distinction between those rights that constitute the freedom of speech or expression and those that constitute the freedom of the press. For instance, John Stuart Mill begins On Liberty with a strongly worded proclamation about the need for "liberty of the press" but goes on to enumerate arguments for freedom of expression in general. Indeed, outside of the occasional peripheral mention, "liberty of the press" and the workings of the press, in general, are very much non-issues in his argumentation. Furthermore, both he and his father depict the press as a means of extending and preserving the type of public opinion formation and propagation found in the Pnyx and forum - though, it should be noted, John Stuart Mill does qualify this assertion (Mill, 1992 & Mill, 1972b, 193). It should also be noted that the overall focus of Mill's argument in On Liberty is upon the utility of open debate rather than the technical means by which it is achieved. As Judith Lichtenberg remarks: "It is much the same with the other standard sources in the literature of freedom of the press: The press is treated as a voice, albeit a more powerful one, on a par with individual voices, and defending press freedom is then tantamount to a general defence of free speech (Lichtenberg, 1990a, 105)."

As a result of this concealed bias the conventional viewpoint is marred by a somewhat simplistic understanding of communication in a nation state. This oversimplified attitude is particularly evident in discussion of the role of the press and its role in "publicizing" the functions and actions of government. For example,

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Guizot remarks that "in publicity consists the bond between a society and its government" (Guizot, 1852, 80). Yet such a perspective fails to recognize a crucial point, as germane then as it is now, in the field of communications in large-scale societies. In plain words, it is that the media can never solely act as simple transmission belts of opinion and information. Instead, the numerous quandaries involved in any attempt by a large number of citizens to directly interact with one another dictates that a division of labour take place: it is necessary that some communicate on behalf of others. The role of the media is essentially ***representative*** in both nature and content. The media function as a means of re-presenting opinions and information; of disseminating present opinions previously absent, without making them literally present, but only indirectly present, through an intermediary - the media itself (Keane, 1991, 44). Indeed, the introduction of the media into the process of social and political communication fundamentally alters the dynamics to be found in a model of politics like that of the *agora*, town hall or legislature. In any of these instances there is no need for individuals, in communicating their opinions or information to one another, to rely on or utilize mediating professionals "to interpret the world for them, tell them what was important, or map out different opinions for them - these were all things that citizens would do for themselves" (Berry et al., 1995, 51). Yet, this is something that James Mill sees as a constituent part of the media's role in a democracy. Rather than functioning as a purely unsophisticated vehicle by which information and opinion is conveyed through and to the fields of social and political power, the press act in a capacity similar to that of elected representatives (Keane, 1991, 43).

While it is raised in a rather indirect and undeveloped manner, Mill's conception of the role of the press is very much akin to that of an intermediary. James Mill conceives the role of the media as an **aid** or **instrument** to the process of public deliberation. It is not so much that the media communicate on **behalf** of the public as Mill visualizes them as facilitating the process of public communication

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and opinion formation. Notwithstanding this, Mill's image of the press as a representative mechanism is an extremely limited one. To the degree that the press operate on behalf of the public, they do so in order to expedite the involvement of the public in the process of opinion formation. In Mill's eyes the publication of reports about the actions of the people's representatives is a technological extension of the idea of individuals offering their opinions or observations in a face-to-face conversation. Similarly, any opinion or interpretation that the press offers as a means of guiding the judgement of the public is viewed in a parallel fashion. The implications raised by even this limited comprehension of the press as a representative mechanism in relation to the general public are not addressed by Mill. Instead, his vision of the role of the press is an uneasy mixture of representation on the behalf of the public while simultaneously furthering their direct involvement an ongoing conversation about social and political matters.

On the whole, the issue of the media functioning as representatives, contrary to the argument advanced by Keane in The Media and Democracy (1991, 43 - 45), did not go wholly unrecognized in the writings of advocates of a free press and its benefits. If anything, the primary problem was that said proponents failed to appreciate the complete implications involved in the question of media-as-representatives. An apt example of this condition is found in the case made for the media as the "fourth estate". By the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of the press as a fourth estate, "a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making" was deeply entrenched in both popular and theoretical thinking about the role of the press (Carlyle, 1935, 215)(6). Throughout this period pronouncements attesting to the power and capability of the press as the "fourth estate" were both frequent and wide-ranging in their weight and thoroughness. Two archetypal and influential statements of "fourth estate" theory are to be found in a pair of articles separated by over thirty years. The first was written by Henry Reeve and published in the Edinburgh Review in October 1855, while the second was written by W. T.

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Stead and published in The Contemporary Review in May 1886. Despite the temporal distance between them, both articles present remarkably similar arguments in terms of the claims that they make for political role of the newspaper press.

Reeve argues that the "vast and prepondering" power of the press makes journalism "truly an estate of the realm; more powerful than any of the other estates" (Reeve, 1855, 477). He attributes this power to three causes - to the special value of the functions that they exercise; to the remarkable talent with which they are habitually conducted; and to the generally high and pure character that they maintain (***Op. Cit.***, 478). It is the first of these ascribed justifications that is of relevance to the discussion at hand. Reeve believed the "special value" of the press was because they were "a necessary portion, complement, and guardian of free institutions" (***Ibid.***). Besides informing the minds and enlightening the judgement of the public(7), Reeve saw the press as part and parcel of the *representation* of the country (***Op. Cit.***, 479: *emphasis* in original). It is necessary for the press to become part of the institutional structure of representation since the House of Commons was not, and perhaps never could be, a complete and perfect representative of all classes, interests and shades of opinion. This deficiency on the part of the House of Commons was especially pronounced since at the time, as Reeve noted, "non-electors are more numerous than electors": "Thousands of Englishmen of nearly every rank - dwellers in towns that are not boroughs, dwellers in counties who are not freeholders nor large tenants, residents in cities who are not householders - have no members of Parliament to listen to them and to speak for them. The holders of unusual opinions, or of moderate or philosophic doctrines, the votaries of 'coming' creeds, the members of minorities in a word, are unrepresented in Parliament, unless by some happy accident (***Ibid.***)."

It followed, then, that since Parliament was unrepresentative of a large part of the nation, it was frequently at variance with the political feeling of the nation, or

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a significant section thereof. Reeve maintained that the lack of correspondence between the legislature and the public was made even more severe by the internal flaws of the House of Commons. Namely:

> It sits only half the year. It is overwhelmed with details of business. It cannot suffice to give utterance to half the thoughts that are bursting for expression, or to ask half the questions that the country is burning to have answered. Moreover, chosen as it is; fettered as it is by peculiar rules; managed as it is by skilful politicians, experienced in all its potent and suppressing forms; composed as it is necessarily of men who, however they habitually share the popular sentiments, have by virtue of the seat, as a mere consequence of being there, interests and wishes not always in harmony with those of their constituents (as, for example, when any questions are in agitation which might involve a dissolution), - the House of Commons is often, ostensibly, and far oftener in reality, at variance with the prevalent feeling of the nation, or of some powerful section of it (***Ibid.***).

Given this situation, Reeve saw the newspaper press as acting as an vital safety valve that moderated discontent by allowing it a vent for expression. More meaningfully, Reeve perceived "the most necessary and practically important" function of the press to lie in their ability to allow for the articulation and exposition of individual grievances and wrongs. This, he felt, was a surer and stronger guarantee against injustice and oppression than any other institutions or any form of government could be (***Op. Cit.***, 480). In this capacity, the press were a quicker, more certain, means of securing redress against the "quiet and insensible tyranny" that even the freest and most popular executive could be guilty of than the courts of justice could ever be (***Ibid.***). Finally, he thought that newspapers were not only indispensable to the public; they were also of the greatest service to government by providing them with information about the sentiment of the public: "It would be very difficult for even the best intentioned administration to be thoroughly well informed as to the state of feeling and opinion in the nation, except through the medium of the various and discrepant organs of the daily and weekly press. The House of Commons can only most imperfectly supply this information; often its members themselves learn the

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wishes of their constituents principally or exclusively through this unrecognized channel (***Op. Cit.***, 481)." In the end, Reeve concludes that journalism "is not the instrument by which the various divisions of the ruling classes express themselves; it is rather the instrument by means of which the aggregate intelligence of the nation criticises and controls them all. It is indeed the 'Fourth Estate' of the Realm: not merely the written counterpart and voice of the speaking 'Third' (***Op. Cit.***, 487)."

Thirty years later, Reeve's arguments about the function of the press within the institutional structure of democratic government were repeated by Stead, albeit with some minimal variations on the theme. Like Reeve, Stead argued that the House of Commons has ceased to effectively represent its constituents and has lost its *raison d'etre*: "It is a usurpation based on fraud" (Stead, 1886b, 654). However, Stead contends that although the House of Commons has ceased to represent the public and has become a despotism, it is a despotism tempered by the Press: "That is to say, in other words, that the absolutism of the elected assembly is controlled and governed by the direct voice of the electors themselves (***Ibid.***)." Utilizing a manner of speaking all too familiar within arguments about the liberty of the press, Stead claimed that the press, alongside the telegraph, were the means by which Great Britain was converted "into a vast agora, or assembly of the whole community, in which the discussion of the affairs of State is carried on from day to day in the hearing of the whole people (***Ibid.***)." Moreover, Stead believed that it was chiefly because of this capacity to extend the reach of public discussion that the press had any influence over the House of Commons. It is a power that arose, like the power by which the Commons controlled the Peers, and the Peers in turn controlled the King, from the press being nearer to the people. As Stead remarks: "They are the most immediate and most unmistakable exponents of the national mind. Their direct and living contact with the people is the source of their strength. The House of Commons, elected once in six years, may easily cease to be in touch with the people (***Ibid.***)." While the sentiments and opinions of an elected representative may drift

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from those of his constituency, a newspaper editor needs to keep in close touch with the concerns and interests of his readers. If he does not interest these readers, the newspaper will not be read. An editor must, even if against his own proclivities and interests, write on topics about which he does not care, because if he does not, the public will desert him for the rival who does (***Op. Cit.***, 655).

Both Reeve and Stead envision the press as taking up the original role that the third estate, or, as Disraeli would have it its proxy - the House of Commons - had seemingly abdicated. Stead proclaims that "the newspaper has become what the House of Commons used to be, and still is in theory, for it is the great court in which all grievances are heard, and all abuses brought to the light of open criticism (Stead, 1886b, 673)." As well, both of them conceive of the press as an instrument acting in and looking out for the interest of the public(8). For instance, Reeve remarks that in a newspaper "every individual Englishman possesses a protector whose value cannot be exaggerated, and that aggregate of individuals which we call the public possesses a guardian of its interests which no power can silence, no money can corrupt, and no flattery can lull to sleep (Reeve, 1855, 480)." As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the press are construed as a powerful and influential spokesman of and for public opinion.

For both authors, the advantages that accrue to the press are especially pronounced when comparison is drawn between them and the Parliament. On each count, the press are deemed superior to the House of Commons since their relationship with the people is viewed as being much more immediate. In an article concerned with the "future of journalism" published six months after the one cited, Stead concludes that Parliament has reached its utmost development. As a consequence, there is a need for a "new representative, not to supersede but to supplement that which exists - a system which will be more elastic, more simple, more direct, and more closely in contact with the mind of the people (Stead, 1886a,

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678)." Other than the groundwork laid by the practice and the role of the press, Stead sees no other contender in the offing. By the same token, Stead also claims that the constituency of a newspaper is wider than that of the legislature: "Everything that is of human interest is of interest to the Press (Stead, 1886b, 669)." Like Reeve before him, Stead notes that members of the legislature were only concerned with the limited amount of the populace who could actually vote. Yet, voters numbered, at that time, even under household suffrage, only a seventh of the total population. Often the "good copy" that a newspaper must have was, in Stead estimation, to be found amongst the outcast and the disinherited of the earth than among the "fat and well-fed citizens" (***Ibid.***). Similarly, Reeve argued that newspapers were just as truly representatives of the people as members of parliament. The only difference between them, in his mind, was that "they attain their rank by a different mode of choice: in the latter case, they are elected beforehand by the people; in the former they nominate themselves, but can retain their seat and exercise their functions only if their nomination be confirmed (Reeve, 1855, 481)(9)."

However, to the extent that their image of the political role of the press is parasitic on and derived from an understanding of the function of the House of Commons, Reeve and Stead's conception is imbued with a slight vagueness. This uncertainty stems from three aspects pertaining to their understanding of the role of the press. First off, there is indirect modelling of the functions of the press upon those attributed to the House of Commons. Initially, the House of Commons had begun as nothing more than a spokesman of public opinion. Any and all powers that parliament subsequently acquired or professed were based upon the validity of its claim to speak for the people - to be public opinion made articulate: the earliest discernable functions of parliament are more those of what might be classified as a national jury of public opinion rather than the supreme body of legislative, executive and judicial power that it became five centuries later (Burns, 1977, 46). Notwithstanding this, by the eighteenth century, the House of Commons was not only

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the voice of the people; constitutionally, it was the people (***Ibid.***). As Bryce observed, parliament as a "sovereign and constituent assembly" can "make and unmake any and every law, change the form of government or the succession to the crown, interfere with the course of justice, extinguish the most scared private rights of the citizen. Between it and the people at large there is no legal distinction, because the whole plentitude of the people's rights and powers resides in it, just as if the whole nation were present within the chamber where it sits. In point of legal theory it is the nation (Bryce, 1927 - volume one, 35-36)." Both Reeve and Stead fail to recognize that the very role that they are ascribing to the media comes about because of a belief that the practice of House of Commons and its relationship to the commons has departed from the constitutional principles on which the authority and power of parliament were claimed to rest (Burns, 1977, 47). That this is the case is evident in their conceptualization of the role of the press as one in which they are to inform and communicate a public opinion exterior to that found in the legislature. For instance, Stead views the press as "the Chamber of Initiative" in which policy proposals are debated and assessed before they are "read for the first time in the House of Commons." He further observes that the press offer "free and open halls" in which "the voice of the poorest and humblest can be heard. ... There is no democratic debating-place as the columns of the Press (Stead, 1886b, 656 - 657)."

The second facet of this ambivalence revolves around their characterization of how the press were to interact with and respond to the flow of public opinion. As in the case of parliament before it, the nature of the relationship between the press and public opinion was somewhat equivocal. On the one hand, Reeve and Stead - like many other defenders of a free press - view the "closeness" of the press to the public as meaning that they will reflect popular opinion more accurately than the legislature. As Stead puts it a newspaper must "palpitate with actuality" and be a mirror reflecting all views and opinion in a particular locality (***Op. Cit.***, 655). After all, both see the press as the chief vehicle by which members of the legislature can

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learn the opinions of their constituents. On the other hand, the press are also conceived as a medium by which the opinion public may be **instructed** and **shaped.** Besides providing information about the state of the public mind, Reeve contends that the press are an invaluable means for the government to convene and cultivate public opinion. By means of the press, the government "may prepare the public mind for a great measure, educate it to the understanding of a complicated subject, penetrate it to the core with some healing or prolific principle, clear up misconceptions, defend themselves against slanderous accusations, insinuate needful elucidations and explanations which yet could not well have been officially supplied (Reeve, 1855, 482)." As well, Reeve sings the praises of the press as an instrument through which the "bare facts" are placed in an appropriate context and light. Most individuals are too busy with the "daily avocations of their own career" to properly ponder and contemplate the raw material that the press brings to their attention on a daily basis. Therefore, Reeve argues, it is essential that:

> the reading and reigning people should be furnished, in addition to the raw material of the narrative, with such clear criticisms and such condensed dissertations as the keenest and best qualified intellects of the country can supply. To make up our minds promptly and decidedly on matters of public policy or on the conduct of public men is no easy task for any but those trained to the work. The mass, ..., will always need extraneous aid in the performance of this task; and journalists here discharge somewhat the same function as the pleadings of the advocate and the summary of the judge in our courts of law (***Op. Cit.***, 478).

To this end, journalists arrange, collate, condense and interpret for the benefit of the reading public, calling attention to things that may have been overlooked, pointing out what they see as significant and what is less so, explaining the technical and placing before the public the matters for consideration in a prepared form that aspires towards clarity as well as instruction (***Ibid.***). Likewise, Stead also thinks of the press as an independent agent upon the "public mind". He holds that an editor has every advantage on his side for the purpose of moulding "his" constituency into his own

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way of thinking (Stead, 1886b, 655). Yet, Reeve also celebrates the press as the vehicle by which the government gains a more immediate picture of public sentiment. In fact, these services that the "fourth estate" provides to the government are scarcely any less necessary or important than those that they render to the public. While the press supply the latter with a safe channel in which to express "those feelings which might else find a vent in overt acts of discontent and insubordination, and it keeps the former cognisant of popular sentiments and passions which it is most essential it should understand and be made acquainted with (Reeve, 1855, 480 - 481)." On the one hand, the press "think" for the public. While on the other, they are to supply the government with information, if not a representation, of popular sentiments and passions. In being an intermediary between the public and government, the press are, in Reeve's conception, playing two different, if not conflicting, types of roles.

Overlooked by Reeve, Stead and other advocates of a free press are the implications involved when the media serve as an intermediary between the public and the government. This is the third respect in which Reeve and Stead's understanding of the press's role is ambiguous. While the media are more immediate and closer to the public, they still function - like the members in the legislature - as a **representative** mechanism. In spite of Reeve's insistence to the contrary, newspaper editors and reporters, unlike members of parliament, are generally not elected by the citizenry. Then as now, most media are organized as private, profit-seeking business where editors, reporters, and so on are employees of these businesses. As such, it is very likely that these professional communicators will: a) be hired for other reasons than purely to please and inform the public; and b) possess values and interests at odds with those of the general public (Page, 1996, 6). Accordingly, there are several crucial questions in this regard that advocates of a free press failed to examine or consider. Foremost amongst these is the perennial question of how representatives are to "represent" their constituency? Should

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representatives act in what they perceive to be the best interests of their constituency? Do they best serve the interests of their constituents by interpreting and acting based on their own judgement? Or should they only act as their constituents want? Should they function as delegates, acting as if their constituents were acting for themselves? Although conceived of as a representative of the people, proponents of a free press did not subject this issue to much in the way of detailed consideration.

The questions raised by the issue of representation are particularly vexatious within a discussion of the political role of the media. This is especially the case given the underlying conception of public deliberation and its subsequent benefits that are involved. Overall, the media are viewed as part of a trend in which government is more firmly rooted within the general populace away from aristocratic or monied elites. As Stead sees it nations are becoming more and more impatient with intermediaries between themselves and the exercise of power (Stead, 1886b, 653). Rhetorically, if not theoretically, the press are portrayed as an instrument by which popular aspirations towards governance might be realized. Namely, they are perceived as being a vehicle by which a nation is turned into one vast agora in which the discussion of state affairs can take place in front of the entire public. A number of benefits are seen to result from this. For instance, through the media government policy and such acquire a truly "public" dimension: publication renders issues, information and opinion public in the sense that they are accessible to all individuals (see chapter 2). However, underlying all this is the belief that the press are an answer to the perceived problems of representation by and through the House of Commons. But this solution is, at heart, no more than the addition of another layer of intermediaries between the citizenry and the power of policy decision-making and implementation. Furthermore, this layer of intermediaries is beset by a similar set of theoretical and practical problems as the representatives whose dysfunctions and deficiencies they are to remedy. As well, these difficulties are further augmented by a vacillation in the understanding of the press as being both a channel and guardian

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of public opinion: that is, the press are simultaneously to be a delegate for as well as a representative of the public interest.

It is believed that by the extension of the temporal and spatial limits or boundaries of debate the press are able to expedite the participation of a greater number of individuals in the process of public deliberation. Through the liberty of discussion and the publication thereof provided by the media not only a few privileged individuals, but the whole public are made participants in the art and actions of government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise that is to be gained from it (Mill, 1972b, 262). John Stuart Mill's thoughts on the nature of government and the benefits of participation provide a suitable access point for further exploration of the vagueness arising from the paradoxical manner in which the media-as-representative is conceived. The sentiments that Mill expresses about the benefits to be obtained from the public's participation and involvement in the process of deliberation have much in common with those made by advocates of a free press.

Mill sees good government as involving two aspects. First, there is the question of "how far it promotes the good management of society by means of the existing faculties, moral, intellectual, and active, of its various members" and this measure of good government appertains to government viewed as "a set of organised activities for public business" (***Op. Cit.***, 223 -4 & 210). In Mill's estimation government as "a set of organised activities for public business" was less important than the first element. In this regard, Mill views government as "a great influence acting on the human mind" and the best gauge to judge political institutions is "the degree in which they promote the general mental advancement of the community, including under that phrase advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency (***Op. Cit.***, 210)." Government and political institutions are, first and foremost, educative. It is primarily for this reason, that Mill deems popular,

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democratic government as the "ideally best polity". In such a polity, every citizen not only has a voice in the exercise of sovereignty, but also, on occasion, is "called on to take an actual part in the government, by the personal discharge of some public function, local or general" (***Op. Cit.***, 223). On account of this, Mill argues against a benevolent despotism that would, under certain circumstances, be able to carry out the second function of government in a far more rational and efficient manner. For, he asks, "what sort of human beings can be formed under such a regimen? What development can either their thinking or their active faculties attain under it (***Op. Cit.***, 219)?" It does not follow that in such a situation the entire nation outside the circles of government will be without intellectual power. The business and demands of day-to-day life will call for some considerable intelligence as well as practical ability. But the public will remain without information and without interest in all the greater matters of social and political practice: if they do have any knowledge of these matters, it will be a dilettante knowledge, "like that which people have of the mechanical arts who have never handled a tool" (***Ibid.***). Beyond their intelligence, Mill also sees the development of individuals' moral capacity being equally stunted and curtailed: "Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially circumscribed, their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed in the same proportions (***Op. Cit.***, 219 - 220)."

It is within the context of popular, participatory government that Mill feels an appropriately "active", public-spirited character is fostered(**10**). Participation is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the politically passive are forever in danger of having their interests dismissed and disregarded. The rights and interests of every and any person are only secure when that person is able, and habitually disposed, to stand up for them (***Op. Cit.***, 224). The best guardian of an individual's interest is that person alone. Secondly, political participation fostered and enhanced the moral and intellectual capacities of individuals. This improvement, for Mill, as discussed above, is the principal element of "good government" (***Op. Cit.***, 222). The

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intellectual capacities of individuals are improved through participation because "the only sufficient incitement to mental exertion, in any but a few minds in a generation, is the prospect of some practical use to be made of its results (***Op. Cit.***, 219)." Mill feels that there is no stronger inducement than the fact that the prosperity of all attains a greater height and diffusion in proportion to the amount and variety of personal energies that are invested in it (***Op. Cit.***, 224). Similarly, the ethical faculties of an individual are developed and expanded through participation in public affairs. This is the case since it is necessary for an active participant in political deliberation to "weigh interests not his own, to be guided, in the case of conflicting claims, by another ruler than his private partialities; to apply, at every turn, principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the common good (***Op. Cit.***, 233)."

Correspondingly, Mill believed that any form of government suffers from two negative defects. The first of these is that insufficient power is concentrated in or allocated to the hands of authorities in regards to preserving order and promoting the progress of the people (***Op. Cit.***, 261). Secondly, a government is defective to the degree it does not sufficiently develop "by exercise the active capacities and social feelings of the individual citizens (***Ibid.***)." To correct or prevent this defect, a government should endeavour to diffuse the exercise of public functions as widely as possible. This might be achieved, for example, by conferring on as many of the citizenry as possible the right to vote or by opening up to all classes of private citizens the widest participation in the details of judicial and administrative business; "as by jury trial, admission to municipal offices, and above all by the utmost possible publicity and liberty of discussion, whereby not merely a few individuals in succession, but the whole public, are made, to a certain extent, participants in the government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise derivable from it (***Op. Cit.***, 262)." For Mill the design and intent of the free exchange of information and opinion, beyond the extent to which it promoted the goals of governance, was to

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build and improve the character of the citizenry. This was the central and basic utility that he believed open debate possessed. However, Mill regarded the day-to-day practice of newspapers as making them nothing more than vehicles of conformity that did the "thinking" of the people for them (Mill, 1972a, 134)(**11**).

But a lack of correspondence between the practice and theory of the press was built into the very understanding of their political role. Indeed, the conception of the media's role in this regard sends, at best, mixed signals. As much as the press were understood to be a medium that extending the reach and breadth of debate, they were also conceived of as an instrument that with telling effect removes the public from active participation in the process of debate. Moreover, this displacement was a central element in understandings of their role and function. The press and its tasks were defined through the conception of the kind of relationship that they are to have with the public. As discussed previously, this role involves the dissemination of opinion and information: to recall an example previously cited, Stead viewed the press as an instrument, alongside the telegraph, by which an entire nation is transformed into a "vast agora" in which the discussion of the affairs of State is carried on in front of the public (Stead, 1886b, 654). As well, Reeve held that if the citizenry were to control, guide and stimulate the administration they must, as far as possible, become qualified to do so (Reeve, 1855, 478). It was the duty of the press to furnish individuals' with all the materials that they might need to "inform their minds" and "enlighten their judgement", so that they will function as participating citizens rather than "passive subjects" (***Ibid.***). The press were, implicitly, viewed as a means of furthering the participation of the citizenry in the act of government as well as a means of improving their intellectual and moral capacities.

But the kind of "participating citizens" and involvement to be cultivated by the press was rendered unclear given the way the role of the press-as-representative was understood. Namely, the equivocal manner in which the press are to act as either

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a reflector or sculptor of public opinion. The press were, as Reeve puts it, the "great organ of utterance" that sometimes form and sometimes express the general opinion of the people: to the degree that the press reflect or shape public opinion Reeve believes that they can "never be ignorant of it or out of harmony with it" (***Op. Cit.***, 481). However, the absence of discord is, in effect, guaranteed by how he conceives the press positioning themselves via the public and the expression of opinion. The press are placed before the citizenry not as an vehicle or instrument of public debate but rather as **the** embodiment or manifestation of this process of deliberation. For not only does the press furnish the materials upon which the public's conclusions will be founded: Reeve believed that they furnish "the conclusions themselves, cut and dried - coined stamped, and polished. It inquires, reflects, decides for us. For five pence or a penny (as the case may be) it *does all the thinking* of the nation; it saves us the trouble of weighing and perpending, of comparing and deliberating; and presents us with ready-made opinions clearly and forcibly expressed (***Op. Cit.***, 477 - 478: *emphasis* in original)." The press tellingly assume the very function that their proponents believed they would bestow upon the citizenry. As a result, the public become *de facto* spectators to, rather than *bona fide* participants in, an ongoing process of deliberation carried on in their interest and for their benefit.

Thus, the kind of participation that is encouraged by the press acting in this fashion is not altogether clear. While the process of public deliberation is "opened up" by the mediation of the press, the manner in which the press positions themselves between this debate and the citizenry limits the extent to which active participation might result. The press assume a role in "the public interest" that involves them largely defining and interpreting the content of selfsame interest. But often neglected in this conception is a degree of reflection upon how the public itself will respond to and employ such efforts on its behalf. The focus is mainly upon the role of the press, to the exclusion of any notice of how their action might effect the citizenry. Once again, John Stuart Mill's comments on the advantages to be realized by the citizenry

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from "active" participation in public functions are suggestive. Mill believes that the "maximum of the invigorating effects of freedom" are only obtained when the individual acted on either is a citizen fully privileged as any other or looking forward to become such (Mill, 1972b, 232). In particular he stresses the practical discipline that an individual's character is subject to from the demands made by the occasional exercise of some public social function. Such an individual is made to feel part of the public as well as a potential recipient of any benefit to be secured therein.

Furthermore, Mill sees the effect of such an obligation upon an individual's ideas and sentiments as being all the more potent since their day-to-day life rarely, if ever, provides any impetus to acquiring or utilizing a more universal "public spirit". Mill notes that in this context an individual's "work is routine; not a labour of love, but of self-interest in the most elementary form, the satisfaction of daily wants; neither the thing done, nor the process of doing it, introduces the mind to thoughts or feelings extending beyond individuals; if instructive books are within their reach, there is no stimulus to read them; and in most cases the individual has no access to any person of cultivation much superior to their own. Giving him something to do for the public, supplies, in a measure, all these deficiencies (Mill, 1972b, 233)." If an individual is given nothing to do or no opportunity to engage in such activities and functions, the likelihood that they will commit the time or energy demanded by participation in public deliberation is very slight. Outside of having a taste for such activity, it is unlikely that a rational citizen will put themselves to the trouble of thought if it is to have no outward effect, or qualify themselves for functions they will have no chance of exercising (***Op. Cit.***, 219). Newspapers become much like the ignored instructive books mentioned by Mill. Thus, in the case of the press their assumption of doing the thinking for the public provides little incentive for individual citizens to pursue such matters. As a result, the moral part of the instruction afforded by the participation of private citizens in public functions is cogently undercut. If the press are to supply conclusions and opinions to a public

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that is too busy with their occupations to have the time - let alone the patience and talent - to participate, as well as having little in the way of inducements to do so, the consequent participation that may result is, in some measure, of a token nature. This is especially the case if the citizenry is receiving information on matters and processes in which they will have little or no input or involvement. If anything, the sense of involvement that is promoted will be of a passive and languorous nature and fall far short of the desired goal. Although Mill described the press as the "real equivalent" of the Pnyx and forum, he qualified this commensurability with the phrase "though not in all respects an adequate one" (***Op. Cit.***, 193). That is, in one the formation and propagation of opinion is carried out without a layer of intermediaries between the process and the citizenry, explaining, interpreting and clarifying it for them. As a consequence a more active type of involvement is required in order for an individual to participate.

However, as James Farr notes, John Stuart Mill is "an incredibly ambivalent theorist" from whom to draw inspiration or support for the prospects and practice of democratic discussion (Farr, 1993, 383). On the one hand, Mill dismisses the claims of critics that representative assemblies are nothing more than "places of mere talk and *bavardage*" as being misplaced. Following this dismissal Mill goes on to discuss how he envisions the place of public deliberation within the framework of democratic government. He begins by noting that he knows of no other way in which a representative assembly can spend its time other than engaging in talk. This is especially the case if the subject of this discussion is the "great public interests of the country". Since the representative assembly is a place where every shade of opinion and every interest can have its cause argued in the presence of and against the interests and viewpoints of the government, it is, in Mill's mind, one of the most important political institutions that can exist (Mill, 1972b, 260). However, Mill then goes on to note that such "talking" should never be looked on with "disparagement" as long as it does not interfere with the actual "doing" of government. This, he notes,

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would never happen "if assemblies knew and acknowledged that talking and discussion are their proper business, while *doing*, as the result of discussion, is the task not of a miscellaneous body, but of individuals specially trained to it (Mill, 1972b, 259 - 260 : *emphasis* in original)." While Mill's vision of democracy accords discussion a central place, it is mainly to serve as a means of collective self-enlightenment for the general populace. His chief concern is the utility that open debate can have for the individual: he sees it as a means by which the individual can develop their immanent potential rather than a instrument by which they will wield and exercise the power of government and policy-making. Instead, the actual governing would be done by a body of professional legislators and bureaucrats, for whom "every hour spent in talk is an hour withdrawn from actual business" (Mill, 1972b, 260). However, while Mill does not view or theoretically render discussion as the selfsame instrument of democratic empowerment in the manner that present-day theorists of democratic deliberation do (since this was not his primary theoretical concern or goal), they both share an underlying belief in discussion as a means of beneficial instruction for individual citizens.

Similarly, it should be noted that Mill's central objection to the press "doing the thinking" of the public is not so much with their assumption of this action as it is with the character of those who assume it. That is, his concern is that citizens have no real access to or instruction from any "person of cultivation much superior to their own". He complains that those who do the "thinking" are far too similar to the public, who are always a "mass", or "collective mediocrity" (Mill, 1972a, 134). From this, he feels, only mediocrity is bound to be the end product: "No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few (***Ibid.***)." Mill believes that the

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"honour and glory" of the "average" person is that they are sufficiently capable and adept at following the initiative, counsel and example of the person of genius (***Ibid.***). Such "exceptional" individuals, in Mill's view, can never seize the government and make it in their own image; instead all they can do is claim the freedom to point the way. To the degree that the press can help them in this goal, they should seek to fill their pages with the views and thoughts of the gifted and learned rather than the mediocre - a move that would increase the overall benefit that could be accrued by other individuals in society.

If anything, Mill's comments point to the need for a full appraisal to be given to the impact and effect of the press within a much larger context than that normally utilized by proponents of the liberty of the press. Due to the bias imparted by a model of communication derived entirely from a face-to-face type of interaction proponents of a free press and its benefits gave little, if any, attention to the issue of how and within what context the public received and employed the media. Although such factors are often only examined in the context of contemporary electronic media like radio and television, the same factors applied in regard to a medium like that of the newspaper press. A central problem in theories of the media, past and present, is that they tend to overwhelmingly focus on one aspect of what the media do and reify this as the entirety of their role. In the case of the arguments made for a free press, the media are conceived primarily, if not exclusively, as a political medium with important functions within a liberal democracy (Curran et al, 1980, 288). Thus, the provision of information on social and political matters becomes the yardstick by which the actual and potential performance of the media is measured. However, such a perspective overlooks the multitude of other things that the media also provide to the public. The pursuit of information is not the sole reason why people use and consume the various types of media product that they do; frequently the media, then as now, are utilized as sources of entertainment and diversion.

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In turn, this point raises the question as to the overall suitability of the press as an educational tool. Champions of a free press readily portray and assume that it would function as a effective, if not potent, pedagogical tool. For example, Thomas Jefferson believes that the people were the "safe depository" of the ultimate powers of society. If the public is thought to be insufficiently enlightened to "exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education (Jefferson, 1905a, 163)." Jefferson concludes that the "discretion of the people" would be better informed by the communication of full information about public affairs through the channel of public papers; it was also necessary to ensure that these papers reached the entire population (Jefferson, 1904, 253). Similarly, James Mill sees the press as the means by which "those who are in danger of mistakes" can receive sufficient instruction so that they will estimate correctly the implication of the acts proposed or done by their representatives (Mill, 1992, 120). The ability of the newspaper press to provide access to the same information and opinion to a dispersed citizenry is seen as a key component in their ability to educate the public. As Reeve remarks, "day after day we have laid upon our table many columns both of comment and of information as pregnant with thought, and as luminous in style, as were the most elaborate productions of our most celebrated writers a few years ago (Reeve, 1855, 483)."

But the manner in which the press carry out these instructive functions is not really examined or considered. The ability of the media to place things before the public on a daily basis is, in fact, a double-edged sword. That is, the media are a very ambiguous instructional agent. For instance, after Reeve notes the press's daily deliverance of columns pregnant with thought, he notes that at times the style that these columns employ might be too flippant; prone to sacrifice truth for effect; produced to provoke immediate reaction rather than prolonged reflection. This, he writes, "is merely to say that the character of the articles is adapted to their object, that they are written as things must be written that are to be read hastily and read only

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once (***Op. Cit.***, 483)." Accordingly, any instructional influence or capability that the columns carried in the press must be weighed against the manner in which the newspaper delivers said information and material. Indeed, the inherent quality of news and newspaper may actually serve to undercut their abilities as an educational instrument. To wit, news is produced, as Reeve notes, not for eternity but for short-term consumption. A newspaper gives a reader a **daily** overview of events: in order to find out how the "breaking" events covered in the day's edition turned out or develop, the reader will need to buy the paper the following day. Journalism is the exploitation of current events, and it besets its consumers with the most intensely parochial, up-to-the-moment experience that its technology will allow (Minogue, 1989, 478). As well, the physical lay-out of a newspaper is not so much to facilitate a particular scholastic point, as it is to sell the paper to a potential paper. Headlines are printed in particular fonts so as to divert the attention of a reader to a particular story: the phrasing utilized is more akin to a carnival barker's pitch, than a summary of the argument to be made. In this light, it can be argued that stories that appear in newspapers are as much about entertainment as they are about educating the public.

In many ways the information provided by newspapers is far too transitory to have the educational impact that is claimed or desired. This tendency to search out and exploit "new" events and sensations has only increased with the subsequent developments in media technology. Newspapers do provide sustained commentary and opinion, but this is always within a surrounding aura of up-to-the-moment-ness. Yet, education involves more than an acquaintance or familiarity with the latest data. It requires, as Minogue observes, that a person be introduced to the resources of a civilization, away from the distractions of current excitements, in the framework of isolation commonly provided by the institution of a school (***Ibid.***). There were contemporaries of the champions of a free press who recognized this. James Madison wrote that "a popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or Tragedy; or, perhaps both

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(Madison, 1910, 103)." However, while this comment is often cited as a buttress for the political role of the press, a more detailed reading of the letter in which it is made reveals that Madison actually had other "learned institutions" in mind; more to the point, not once in this letter does he directly mention or allude to the press as an instrument of "popular information". To wit, he goes on to discuss why the establishment and endowment of "Academies, Colleges, and Universities" ought be done in such a manner as to ensure the access of both rich and poor alike. Madison believed that such 'learned institutions' "throw that light over the public mind which is the best security against crafty and dangerous encroachments on the public liberty. They are the nurseries of skilful Teachers for the schools distributed throughout the Community. They are themselves schools for the particular talents required for some of the Public Trusts, on the able execution of which the welfare of the people depends (***Op. Cit.***, 105)." He then goes on to suggest the inclusion of Geography alongside Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic since "a knowledge of the Globe & its various inhabitants, however slight, might moreover, create a taste for Books of Travels and Voyages; out of which might grow a general taste for History, an inexhaustible fund of entertainment & instruction (***Op. Cit.***, 109)." This would be a good thing in his mind since any reading "not of a vicious species" is a good substitute for the amusements commonly engaged in by the labouring classes.

This understanding of the nature and role of the media implicates them in the process of aiding and abetting the kind of communication thought essential to the formation and maintenance of what has been called the public sphere (Habermas, 1989a). While the "liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere", as Habermas calls it (Habermas, 1989a), is generally viewed as being in decline and fraught with difficulties, the 'critical-rational kernel' within this ideal is seen to be something which can be salvaged and utilized to strengthen democratic practice. Within both the professional ideology of journalists and the understandings of democratic theorists, is an image of society in which there exists a public realm (that is, the state)

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whose doings must be constantly watched and made known to "the public" (that is, the audience of private people in its capacity as citizenry) (Peters & Cmiel, 1991, 211). This public space is a locus in which rational views are elaborated that can guide the policies of government (Spinosa et al., 1997, 85). Moreover, this public sphere not only operates outside of the power of the state but it also operates as a **check** on this power (***Ibid.***). In the ideal public sphere the central goal and objective for the media is to treat individuals as citizens and fellow participants in an ongoing dialogue, rational-critical deliberation and debate (Hallin, 1985). The next chapter will scrutinize the idea of the public sphere advanced by Habermas. It is an idea that has been highly influential and widely embraced by a number of observers as a touchstone of the kind of ends that the media *should* be working towards.

Endnotes

1. The literature on the definition and nature of public opinion defies easy or ready summarization. Discussions of the tension within conceptualization of "public opinion" can be found in various essays in both Salmon & Glasser, 1995 and Hanson & Marcus, 1993; see also Zaller, 1994. Discussion of the changing definitions of "public opinion" at different historical moments see Baker, 1990; Gunn, 1983; Herbst & Beniger, 1990; Ozouf, 1988; Peters, 1995; Sloan, 1994.

2. For example, in responding to an argument made against appealing to "the people" Daniel Defoe declared that: "Its proper to enquire who are these People, of whom this original Power is thus asserted. Negatively, not all the Inhabitants, but positively all the Freeholders, the Possessors of Land have certainly a Right in the Government of it, and if these are called the People, to these there is a Case wherein an Appeal to them is absolutely necessary (*as quoted in* Gunn, 1983, 76)."

3. The existence and implications of this point are often overlooked in discussions of the American example (for example, see Knowlton, 1994; Sloan, 1994).

4. A similar rendering of the nature and content of public deliberation is to be found in the work of Mill's son, John Stuart Mill. J. S. Mill contends that "unless opinions favourable to democracy and to aristocracy, to property and to equality, to co-operation and to competition, to luxury and to abstinence, to sociality and

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individuality, to liberty and discipline, and all other standing antagonisms of practical life, are expressed with equal freedom, and enforced and defended with equal talent and energy, there is no chance of both elements obtaining their due; one scale is sure to go up, and the other down. Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners (Mill, 1972a, 115)."

5. A charge of a similar bias has also been levied against the argument made by Habermas in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. John Thompson has argued that Habermas's conception of the public sphere - whether in the form of the bourgeois public sphere which emerged in the eighteenth century, or in the form of his own, philosophically elaborate model of practical discourse - as essentially being a dialogical conception (See Thompson, 1995; 1994; 1993 & 1990). This point is taken up in further detail in the following chapter.

6. The concept of an "estate" designated an order in society that enjoyed a specified share in the powers of government. Benjamin Disraeli defined it in the following fashion: "An Estate is a political order invested with privilege for a public purpose. There are three Estates: the Lords Spiritual, The Lords Temporal and the Commons (*as quoted in* Smith, 1973, 114)." The questions of whether a "fourth estate" existed and what organization or political forces could be described as such were issues of long-standing contention (for a discussion see Gunn, 1983, 43 - 95).

7. Interestingly enough, the terms in which Reeve describes the manner in which the press complements and guards the "free institutions" of a democratic society are uncommonly similar to those employed by James Mill. Reeve writes: "In a country where the people - *i.e.* the great mass of the educated classes - govern, where they take that ceaseless and paramount interest in public affairs which is at once the inseparable symptom and the surest safe-guard of political and civil liberty, where, in a word, they are participating citizens, not passive subjects, of the State, - it is of the most essential consequence that they should be furnished from day to day with the materials requisite for informing their minds and enlightening their judgement. ... They need, therefore, to be kept *au courant* of all transactions and events which bear upon the interests or credit of their country (Reeve, 1855, 478)."

8. Besides charging the press and parliament with similar virtues, Reeve also reproaches them with the same vices. He assert s that "the fact is that members of the Press are open to just the same charges as members of the Legislature, and to no others. They are often as scandalously unfair. They are often as unwilling to admit virtues in an opponent or errors in a partisan. They are almost as ready to bring false imputations and almost as reluctant to retract them. They are nearly as far from the

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charity that thinketh no evil and that hideth a multitude of sins. Their faction about as often overrides their patriotism. They are at least as prone to fall into a tone and language which grieves the good, repels the moderate, and disgusts the courteous and refined (Reeve, 1855, 485)."

9. A similar understanding can be found in Stead. In proclaiming the degree to which the newspaper must be constantly up to date, Stead goes on to argue that "constituencies sometimes forget they have a member. If they even for one week forgot they had a paper, that paper would cease to exist. The member speaks in the name of a community by virtue of a mandate conferred on poll-days, when a majority of the electors, half of whom may have subsequently changed their minds, marked a cross opposite his name. The editors's mandate is renewed day by day, and his electors register their vote by a voluntary payment of the daily pence. There is no limitation of age or sex (Stead, 1886b, 655)."

10. This summary of Mill's arguments about participation and the benefits to be realized from it draws heavily from a synopsis presented by Spragens in Chapter 5 of his book Reason and Democracy (1990).

11. In part, Mill objects to the fact that the thinking done for the public in the newspapers was done for them by "men much like themselves" instead of wise and noble men. Mill believed that this homogeneity in the generation of public opinion would only serve to undermine the utility of open debate. This point will be examined and explored further in chapter six.

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Chapter Five:

The Public Sphere

If we attend to the course of conversation in mixed companies consisting not merely of scholars and subtle reasoners but also business people or women, we notice that besides storytelling and jesting they have another entertainment, namely, arguing: for storytelling, if it is to have novelty and interest, soon exhausts itself, while jesting easily becomes insipid.

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason

Despite near ceaseless reiteration and emendation, the discourse about the relationship between democracy and the media invariably revolves around an *idée fixe* or symbolic marker that no amount of refurbishment or variation can disguise. This underlying continuity, despite changes in technology, manifests itself in a conception of democratic politics dwelling within most assessments of the impact and function of the media. It is the belief that some version of communicative action lies at the heart of democratic theory and practice: "Without talk, there can be no democracy (Barber, 1984, 267)." In this vision, democracy is an exercise conducted largely through talk or discussion: between elected representatives, between the elected and their constituents, between neighbours and different residents in communities, between friends and members of families. Whatever form it may take, such discussion serves a number of purposes and is more than just the hare-brained chatter of irresponsible frivolity, though it can occasionally wallow, wilfully and quite pleasurably, in such sybaritic depths.

Often characterized as the *classical* view of democracy, this perspective postulates the existence of rational and active citizens who seek to achieve a generally recognized common good through some manner of collective initiation,

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discussion and decision on policy questions concerning public affairs, and through the delegation of authority to specific agents to carry through the broad decision reached by the people by means of majority vote (Davis, 1964, 37 - 38). Although frequently criticized as being unrealistic, this viewpoint is informed by an extremely ambitious, if not attractive, purpose: the education of an entire people to the point where their intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities have reached their full potential and they are joined, freely and actively, in a genuine community (***Op. Cit.***, 40). Within Habermasian discussions of the media and democracy the advancement of this kind of communication is taken as one of the central tasks of the mass media. In so doing, such an argument draws an implicit, if rarely acknowledged, connection between the duties of the media, the forms of deliberation they are to provide and the vision of democracy they are to sustain. When either optimistic or pessimistic judgement is passed on the health of democracy or the performance of the media, it is, in part, a reflection of the assumed relationship between these elements. The nature and significance of this connectedness is made especially transparent in discussions that employ the concept of the *public sphere*.

This chapter will examine the understandings of deliberation and democracy that are contained in the idea of the *public sphere* especially as they relate to perceptions of the role of the media. Specifically, the discussion will inspect the image of democracy as a process of deliberation and debate amongst citizenry advanced in the model of the public sphere articulated by Jurgen Habermas in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. A central element of Habermas's work is that embodied in the notion of the ***bourgeois public sphere*** are certain ideas and principles which still retain their relevance despite the developments and changes in public life since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Paramount amongst these ideas is what Habermas sometimes refers to as the *critical principle of publicity*, as distinct from the notion of *publicity* understood in the more modern sense of product promotion or advertising (Thompson, 1993, 179). For Habermas, and others, this

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idea functions as a yardstick by which existing institutions, such as the media, and their practice might be measured and assessed. An evaluation of the principal points made by Habermas will reveal a number of underlying problems with the vision of deliberation and democratic politics that this model offers. As presently conceived, his vision of the ideal form of *critical publicity* is handicapped through its overt and covert coupling with a particular perception and construction of what constitutes a proper democratic and deliberative political practice as well as a correspondingly effective set of public institutions. Indeed, Habermas's understanding of the public sphere reflects the ongoing ambiguity over the form that democratic politics should take in terms of *authenticity* versus the practical compromises that must be made in order to accommodate and negotiate the logistics of the modern nation-state. As well, the overwhelming focus in the literature upon whether the media do or do not sustain a healthy public sphere has resulted in a distorted picture of the public sphere in terms of the mechanisms by which formal and informal control is exercised by the citizenry. The argument will begin with an outlining of Habermas's original account of the emergence and transformation of the bourgeois public sphere. It will then proceed to summarize the major lines of criticism that have been levelled against Habermas's account in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Finally, the chapter will inspect some issues that have not received much attention in the literature, but which, it will be argued, need to be considered in any attempt to understand the nature of the relationship between the media, communication and democracy.

5.1: The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

Even before the translation of Structural Transformation into English the concept of the public sphere had been habitually associated with the name Jurgen Habermas(1). Nevertheless, some observers have noted that the conception of the public sphere presented by Habermas in this work is not that far removed from the

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Anglo-American liberal tradition and its notion of the market-place of ideas (Dahlgren, 1995, 9; see also Peters, 1993). As a result of the mechanics and idiosyncrasy of translation, Habermas has been credited with the creation of the idea of the *public sphere*. However, his work, in fact, functions as a reconstruction and retrieval of an idea rather than as an Olympian act of philosophical parthenogenesis. The term that Habermas uses, *offentlichkeit* has been translated as *public sphere*. Be that as it may, it is important to note that *public sphere*, as such, does not refer to a newly wrought concept. The German word *offentlichkeit* has at least three different meanings: "a public, an amorphous social structure; public as a quality of information, the awareness that it is known to many *and* commonly known that it is known to many; and public in the sense of the collective knowledge of many, which may or may not lead to action (Stappers, 1983, 144: *emphasis* in original)." Consequently it brings together two of the more commonplace and fundamental political terms of the Anglo-American tradition: "(1) 'publicity' in the sense of openness and access, and (2) 'the public' in the sense of the sovereign body of citizens (Peters, 1993, 543)." In addition, the term might also be read so as to encompass both the abstract sense embodied in **publicity** and the more concrete qualities associated with **public** - in as much that publicity presupposes a concrete 'public' or audience (***Ibid.***). While nowadays the word **publicity** is usually associated with public relations and its affiliated characteristics, the meaning embodied in the German term *offentlichkeit* refers more to the condition of being public or open to the public. A similar understanding of the word *publicity* as meaning both public access to and scrutiny of government as well as public debate in which all might participate can be found in the works of writers such as Bentham, Kant and John Stuart Mill.

The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere had originally served as Habermas's *Habilitationschrift*, a thesis submitted for the postdoctoral qualification required of German professors, and was subsequently published in Germany in 1962.

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Initially, it was Habermas's intention to submit this treatise to Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno at Frankfurt. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, apparently found it both insufficiently critical of the "illusions" of the Enlightenment conception of democratic public life as well as too radical in its politically specific call to go beyond liberal constitutional protections in pursuit of truer democracy (Calhoun, 1992, 4). In the end, Habermas successfully submitted it to Wolfgang Abendroth at Marburg(2). When first published in Germany, Structural Transformation was perceived as a critical rumination on and response to Horkheimer's and Adorno's Dialectic of the Enlightenment. The work was well received and, initially at least, particularly influential within circles of the burgeoning German student movement. However, by the late 1960s Habermas's work, like most of the theoretical work of the Frankfurt school, had become the object of criticism and condemnation from both the New Left and the student movement(3).

In contrast to Habermas's current theoretical and philosophical trajectory, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere readily reflects the intellectual tradition and milieu of the Frankfurt school. At the surface level, Habermas's theory of the public sphere is a form of *Verfallsgeschichte*, a history of decline. By means of this over-arching historical narrative, he traces the emergence and eventual decline of a new type of public sphere. In the case of the media, this path is revealed in the transition from public organs concerned with the formulation of opinion to primarily commercial apparatus that align themselves with the interests of their advertisers (Hohendahl, 1982, 244). Similarly, this progression is parallelled by the movement of the public from being an active culture-debating entity to a more passive culture-consuming one. Many commentators have noted that Habermas's presentation of the disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere does not differ fundamentally from Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of the "culture industry". More to the point, Habermas's work both presupposes this theory and resumes its critique of mass culture in an attempt to historically ground it. However, although Habermas re-

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affirms Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of present circumstances (the consciousness industry, the commodification of culture, the manipulation of the masses), the general thrust of his argument is an attempt to specifically retrieve the past (the Enlightenment as the founding moment of modernity) and uphold its progressive tradition (Eley, 1992, 292).

As opposed to the resigned political conclusions of Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas, through a study of eighteenth and nineteenth century institutions that articulate the underlying normative principles of civil society and the state, attempts to identify those political and social forms that once secured individual autonomy and public freedom. Furthermore, he also advocates the radicalization and adaption of these forms to contemporary conditions so as to revive and reinvigorate the ameliorative potential in *formal* democracy and law (Cohen, 1979, 75). Rather than being an ideological misconception, Habermas views the public sphere as containing the germ of something new and progressive that ultimately transcends its historical and ideological origins. While fully cognizant of the flaws present in the historical embodiment of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas nevertheless argues for its enduring value because of the potential and capacity for self-transformation inherent in the principles by which it, in ideal terms, operates. Additionally, the incorporation of the principles of autonomy, universality of access, and the plurality of political participation into the constitutions of formal democracies established and entrenched immanent standards according to which the institutions of the state are forced to legitimate themselves and their actions (***Op. Cit.***, 81).

But beyond the mere fact of these institutional consequences, the more noteworthy development for Habermas was the moral-practical dimension that accompanied them (Thompson, 1995, 259). In this regard, Habermas perceives the bourgeois public sphere to be a crystallization of what he calls the *critical principle of publicity*. Habermas believes that these constitutional protections point to a

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specific conception of politics as a process of public discourse as opposed to mere coercion and domination. This is an idea that Habermas traces back to Kant's discussion of Enlightenment(4): that the personal opinions of private individuals could evolve into a *public opinion* through a process of open debate accessible to all and free from domination. The institutional infrastructure constituted by the standard liberal civil liberties - speech, press, association, thought, and communication - were intended to provide the means by which individuals can constitute themselves as a public that governs itself free from coercion and domination as well as remaining critically attentive to politics (Warren, 1989, 519).

> In the first modern constitutions subdivisions in the catalogues of basic rights were the very image of the liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere. They guaranteed society as a sphere of private autonomy. Confronting it stood a public authority limited to a few functions, and between the two, as it were, was the realm of private people assembled into a public who, as the citizenry, linked up the state with the needs of civil society according to the idea that in the medium of this public sphere political authority would be transformed into rational authority (Habermas, 1989a, 222).

In these circumstances, legitimation stems not from the authority of persons or sanctity of tradition, but from the exercise of power in an open, public and rational manner. Government becomes a process whereby decisions are made in the context of various alternatives and proposals being put to the test of public discussion. Although it was construed as "power", Habermas argues that the subsequently actualized "legislation was supposed to be the result not of a political will, but of rational agreement. ... *Public debate was supposed to transform* voluntas *into a* ratio *that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all* (Habermas, 1989a, 82 - 83: *emphasis* in original)." If some aspects of the bourgeois public sphere were flawed, it embodied the idea that private individuals were capable of coming together in an open forum as equals and through critical discussion and reasoned argument

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generate a public opinion (Thompson, 1990, 112).

In order to establish the progressive potential and credentials of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas contrasts this form of public life with the previous historical version of what constituted publicness. Such being the case, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere serves as an extended meditation on the nature and function of public life and the ways it has changed from the Renaissance to the present. Habermas traces the distinction between the private and public spheres of life back to classical Greece and Rome. For the ancients, no distinction was made between the state and the public sphere: the public sphere was seen as being part and parcel of the state. However, a strong division was made between *public* and *private* affairs. Public life, as opposed to the private realm or the sphere of the *oikos*, was formed in the market-place and the assemblies where those entitled to the status of citizenship could come together, debate and decide upon matters and issues of policy. The public sphere was constituted in discussion, whether it assumed the form of consultation and sitting in the court of law, or common action such as the waging of war or competition in the various athletic festivals held during the year (Habermas, 1989a, 3). Whereas the wants and necessities of day-to-day living were placed behind the closed veil of the *oikos*, the *polis* furnished an open realm in which public debate about public issues took place: civic debate was conceived of as a part of the *polis*, not as *private* discussion about government (Peters & Cmiel, 1991, 200).

While elements of this *classic* conception of public life have had an enduring influence on how public life has been envisioned, the actual institutional forms of publicness have changed significantly over time(5). For Habermas, the chrysalis of the bourgeois public sphere takes shape in what he calls the *representative publicity* of early absolutist states. In this instance, he argues that a public sphere in the sense of a separate realm distinct from the private sphere did not exist in feudal society of the Middle Ages. Instead, publicness at this time was something like a status

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attribute possessed by the king, and to a lesser extent the nobility. In this instance, the feudal king displayed himself as the embodiment of a "higher" power: his physical, mortal body stood in as a ***representation*** of the body "politic": Louis XIV's declaration that "*l'etat, c'est moi*" concisely embodies this kind of belief. Thus, any sense of a "public" did not extend beyond those persons contained within the limited realm of the king and his court. Representative publicity denoted a space in which the monarch and the nobility, "represent" or display their authority not for but **before** the people. This representation pretended to make something invisible visible through the public physical presence of the lord (Habermas, 1989a, 7). The representative public sphere existed as an arena for the spectacle and display of authority: this form of "public power" does not attempt or care to reflect the interests or needs of the populace, but instead is designed to bear witness to the glory and majesty of the master (Cohen, 1979, 76). To the degree that representative publicity is tied to persons, rather than principles, it was enacted in an elaborate set of codes for lords and ladies in speech, dress, hairstyle and gestures - the code of chivalrous behaviour (Peters, 1993, 545). Characteristically, this system of courtly virtues paid careful attention to the question of virtue's physical manifestation. In its understanding virtue must be embodied; accordingly, it had to be capable, through ritualized behaviour and manners, of public representation (Habermas, 1989a, 8). To this end, representative publicity finds its expression through staged events like pageants, jousting matches, theatrical productions and the complicated rituals of life within the royal court.

With the emergence of commercial capitalism, the structure of the public sphere is changed by the rise of a new social class and the development of a Europe wide system of circulation for both commodities and information. The expansion of trade from an urban to a national and then to an international economy increased merchant's need for regular and reliable information about distant events, prices and supply. Information about prices and demand was initially conveyed in letters

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between merchants: this exchange of information through person-to-person correspondence gradually developed into a series of formal reports and newsletters. From the beginning these "reports" also carried other sorts of information and news about Imperial Diets, wars, miracle cures, murders, pestilence and taxes. As it grew, this system of commercial news came to represent the first network of information and communication independent of the state and the church (Nathans, 1990, 621). Simultaneous to these developments in mercantilism, the state also experienced a profound transformation in its structure and organization. By the end of the eighteenth century, feudal powers like the Church, the monarch and the nobility had disintegrated in a process of polarization; "in the end they split into private elements, on the one hand, and public ones, on the other (Habermas, 1989a, 11)." Habermas singles out the separation of the public budget from the territorial ruler's private holdings as the first visible mark of the polarization of monarchical authority. The bureaucracy, the military, and, to some degree, the administration of justice also begin to emerge as independent institutions of public authority distinct from the ceremonial sphere of the royal court. Similarly, the system of feudal estates is likewise transformed: the nobility became organs of public authority like parliament and the legal institutions; while those engaged in trades and professions, insofar as they had already established urban corporations and territorial organizations, developed into the sphere of *civil society* that as a genuine domain of private autonomy stood opposed to the state (Habermas, 1974, 138).

The development of the state bureaucracies as agents of permanent administration, bolstered by the presence of standing armies, created a new sphere of public authority in national and territorial states (Calhoun, 1992, 8). Continuous state activity now corresponded to the continuity of contact among those trafficking in commodities and news in the stock exchanges, markets or press (Habermas, 1989a, 18). Public authority came to be consolidated into a palpable object distinct from the representative publicity of the king and the nobility, as well as from the

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common people who were both subject to and excluded from it. *Public* no longer referred to the "representative" court of a king endowed with authority, but instead to a state institution regulated according to competence, an apparatus granted with a monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion (Habermas, 1974, 138). But the public sphere was not totally synonymous with the apparatuses of the state, the private individuals subsumed in the state - those at whom public authority was directed - were increasingly regarded as forming the public.

Moreover, an awareness within this emergent public of its status as an oppositional counterpoint to public authority was formed as a result of various administrative attempts - regulations ranging from mercantile policies to dress codes - to control private life. Members of bourgeois public came to see themselves through the category of *public* not as just the object of state action but as the opponent of public authority (Calhoun, 1992, 9).

> Because, on the one hand, the society now confronting the state clearly separated a private domain from public authority and because, on the other hand, it turned the reproduction of life into something transcending the confines of private domestic authority and becoming a subject of public interest, that zone of continuous administrative contact became 'critical' also in the sense that it provoked the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason (Habermas, 1989a, 24).

Suspended between civil society and the state, new cultural institutions arising in urban centres - coffeehouses, clubs, reading and language societies, publishing companies, lecture halls, museums, journals and newspapers - brought into existence a new public world, what Habermas calls the bourgeois public sphere (Landes, 1988, 40). This new public sphere was not part of the state, but instead was a sphere in which the activities of the state could be confronted and subjected to criticism (Thompson, 1995, 70). At the same time, this process had a transformative impact on the institutional form of modern states: government became more and more open

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to scrutiny and was required to account to the public for its policy choices. More than just a mere opposition between state and society, Habermas sees the bourgeois public sphere as institutionalizing a practice of rational-critical discussion of political issues. In turn, the public sphere effectively constitutes citizens as citizens: people come to see themselves as citizens not because they are striving to advance some individual and particular advantage in the policies of the state, and not because they are deeply involved with the beliefs and aims of some movement, but because in engaging others in discussion, even argumentative discourse, they were contributing their knowledge to shaping a consensus that, to some degree, would eventually influence their elected representatives (Spinosa et al., 1997, 86). This, if anything, is the central legacy of the bourgeois public sphere for Habermas. As Habermas notes: "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (Habermas, 1989a, 27)."

The public was able to take on this challenge through the modification of an instrument both state and commercial classes had been using to disseminate information about prices, supply, decrees and government ordinances - the press. Habermas observes that by the last third of the seventeenth century journals and periodicals were supplementing the news with pedagogical instructions and even criticism and reviews (***Op. Cit.***, 25). While authors, mindful of the delicate sensibilities of government authorities, initially made "use of their reason" in a very circumspect manner, they gradually lost their inhibitions about articulating criticism of the activities of the state. Likewise, although periodicals and journals were at first devoted to literary and cultural criticism, they increasingly became concerned with

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issues of more general and social and political significance (Thompson, 1993, 176). These various periodicals, journals and newspapers provided an independent forum in which private opinions could be expressed, debated, and ultimately transformed into public opinion. The press prevailed as an institution of the public itself, effective in the manner of a mediator and intensifier of public discussion (Habermas, 1974, 140).

In addition to the press, Habermas identifies the rise of an assortment of new centres of sociability in the towns and cities of Europe as being a key facilitator in the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere. From around the mid-seventeenth century on, salons and coffeehouses functioned as places in which both cultural and political matters were discussed and debated by a blending of social classes. Moreover, Habermas asserts that there was often a close connection between the press and these centres of sociability. He contends that many of the contemporaneous periodicals and journals were closely interwoven with the life of and discussion taking place within the coffeehouses and salons. Habermas believes that the use of the dialogue form in many of the articles attests to their proximity to the spoken word: "One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to reenter, via reading, the original conversational medium (Habermas, 1989a, 42)." While these various salons, coffeehouses and reading societies might have differed in their size and composition of their members, their style or manner of proceedings, or their topical orientations, Habermas sees them as all sharing a number of common institutional criteria. First, they preserved and provided a kind of social intercourse that tended to disregard considerations of rank and status. Secondly, the discussion that took place within these centres presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned or broached. Finally, the commercialization of culture has the effect of establishing the understanding of the public as consisting, potentially at least, of ***all*** private individuals, persons who - insofar as they were propertied and educated - as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves

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via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion (Habermas, 1989a, 36 - 37)(6).

By the latter half of the nineteenth century a series of rapid social and institutional developments began to alter the conditions and premises upon which the bourgeois public sphere was based. For Habermas, the impact of these developments was such that the public sphere was transformed and effectively "refeudalized". In his view, the model of the bourgeois public sphere "presupposed strict separation of the public from the private realm in such a way that the public sphere, made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state, was itself considered part of the private realm (Habermas, 1989a, 175 - 176)." The ensuing decline of this form of public sphere was due to several overlapping trends. The state began to assume a more interventionist character and took on more responsibility for supervising the welfare of its citizenry. With the advent of mass democracy, the public lost its exclusivity; its socio-discursive coherence fell apart with the inclusion, as citizens, of new groups whose diversity and heterogeneity - in terms of their cultural, economic and educational background - forcefully brings to the fore any questions of inequality that had previously been "bracketed" (Dahlgren, 1995, 8). Furthermore, the entry of this mass of people into the political landscape led to the creation and increasing intervention of large organizations and interest groups in the political process. Consequently, the functioning of the public sphere changed from being one of rational critical debate to that of the negotiation of general compromises between the various and competing interests: "The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special interest associations, parties, and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then is brought in only to contribute its acclamation (Habermas, 1989a, 176)."

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As a consequence of these events, the public sphere became a "managed show" where political and economic elites seek and cultivate the acclamatory assent of a population that is frequently excluded from both public discussion as well as the decision-making process (Thompson, 1990, 113)(7). In Habermas's mind contemporary public life acquired and adopted a quasi-feudal character: "The aura of personally represented authority returns as an aspect of publicity; to this extent modern publicity indeed has affinity with feudal publicity. Public relations do not genuinely concern public opinion but opinion in the sense of reputation. The public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed - rather than *in* which public critical debate is carried out (Habermas, 1989a, 200 - 201: *emphasis* in original)." Similarly, this process of refeudalization extended into the realm of the media in which a press that once could be expected to play a political role "through the transmission and amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public", now "serves the public by keeping individuals 'informed' through the dissemination of facts and expert opinion (Glasser, 1991, 242)." The nature of *publicity* within the public sphere is also transformed as this space is now colonized and dominated by images and discourse whose purpose is to sell and seduce rather than engage and educate. Publicity goes from being a principle of political truth-seeking to a principle of commercial promotion losing its "critical function in favour of staged display; even arguments are transformed into symbols to which again one cannot respond by arguing but only by identifying with them (Habermas, 1989a, 206)."

5.2: Critical Reaction

In its provision of what Peters calls an "archaeology" of the ideas and ideologies that inform current practices and policies of the media (Peters, 1993, 542), The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere supplies a rewarding framework in which to examine how the role of the media is defined and understood. Since its

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original publication in German it has been subjected to vigorous criticism and analysis in regards to both the historical and normative arguments it advances about the bourgeois public sphere(8). Interestingly enough, while many commentators believe that there are respects in which Habermas's argument is unconvincing, a great majority of them nevertheless maintain that The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere remains a vital resource for the development of a constructive social theory of the media (Thompson, 1994, 29; see also Curran, 1996; Curran, 1991a; Dahlgren, 1991; Dahlgren, 1995; Garnham, 1992; Nathans, 1990; Thompson, 1995). Before turning to the aspects of particular concern to the present inquiry, it would be beneficial to review those features of Habermas's account that other commentators view as problematic.

One feature of Habermas's argument that has attracted a great deal of critical analysis is his portrayal and subsequent idealization of the bourgeois public sphere. Some commentators see the concept of the public sphere as having an ambiguous status in his argument since it appears as both a normative ideal to be strived for and as a manifestation of actual historical circumstance in early bourgeois Europe (Dahlgren, 1995, 10). In part, this ambivalence is embodied in and illustrated by Habermas's "stylized" historical analysis and its uncertain wavering between normative commentary and descriptive representation. For example, his depiction of the early press is presented in normative terms, while his critique of modern media is rendered in descriptive terms (Curran, 1991a, 53 - n. 15). This matter is confused further when Habermas's critique of the contemporary situation refers back to the idealization of the early press as if it is something that approaches and functions as descriptive reality (***Op. Cit.***). As well, a sense of ambiguity is heightened by Habermas's retention of the bourgeois public sphere as an ideal at the same time that his analysis demonstrates the limitations and ideological distortions of this historical manifestation. As Dahlgren comments, Habermas's argument is "coloured by both a quality of romanticism verging on nostalgia as well as a pervasive pessimism

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(Dahlgren, 1991, 5)." Moreover, a sensation of impasse is further intensified by Habermas's inability to locate in advanced capitalist societies "an institutional basis for an effective political public sphere corresponding in character and function to that of early capitalism and state formation but corresponding in scale and participation to the realities of later capitalism and states (Calhoun, 1992, 30)." Thus, a seeming nostalgia for the historical bourgeois public sphere coincides with a deep-rooted pessimism about the prospect of developing new forms of critical-rational public life within the contemporary condition of civil society and the state.

Similarly, the veracity and accuracy of Habermas's characterization and depiction of the early press has also been questioned. Recent historical research has revealed a viciously competitive structure within the early print market that was controlled not by freely discoursing intellectuals in search of public enlightenment but rather by budding capitalists in search of a quick profit (Garnham, 1992, 359 - 360). The much mythologized "independent" press has been shown to be caught up in an elaborate web of faction, fighting, financial corruption and ideological management (Curran, 1991a, 41). Similarly, in the context of the pre-revolutionary public sphere in France, Robert Darnton doubts whether eminent publicists of the enlightenment, such as Voltaire, Diderot and d'Alembert, should be taken as being representative of the profession of journalism as a whole. His research has revealed a literary world sharply divided between a few enormously successful and prestigious "mandarins" who circulated in the fashionable, but exclusive, salons, and a "literary proletariat" of hack writers scraping by in the cafes of "Grub Street" (Darnton, 1982, 16, 36). Similarly, Habermas identifies periodicals like Swift's Examiner or Defoe's Review as exemplifying the kind of cultivated and rational-critical discourse that he sees as being encapsulated in and representative of the idea of the public sphere. However, such periodicals were by no means the first nor the most common of early printed material: in England, for example, before, during and after the Civil War a wide range of other printed material from books and pamphlets to news sheets and

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placards was freely circulating amongst those who could read **and** afford them (Thompson, 1995, 72). A more encompassing survey of the full bounty of printed material available would reveal a picture of the public sphere highlighting its commercial and often sensationalist character.

Likewise, while Habermas judges earlier centuries by the works of Locke, Kant, Marx and Mill, his appraisal of the twentieth century is based upon the output of commercial television and other forms of mass entertainment. This unequal treatment results in a distorted picture of both the early and later stages of the public sphere(9). Habermas's account of the twentieth century does not include the kind of intellectual history that characterizes his approach to the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which he takes leading thinkers seriously and tries to recover the truth from their ideological distorted writings (Calhoun, 1992, 33). Conversely, his account of the earlier period does not look at the "penny dreadfuls", lurid crime and scandal sheets or other less than rational or critical manifestations of the press that were equally prevalent as those journals and periodicals that he focuses upon (***Op. Cit.***: see also Keane, 1991). For the most part, Habermas understands media products to be a relatively homogeneous, non-differentiated thing: as such, it is a distorted picture of media communications. Whatever its faults, the market model of distribution and production allows for the existence a wide array of media products that respond to the different needs and demands of different segments of the public. For example, newspapers like *U.S.A. Today* and *The New York Times* or television *news* programs provide very different audiences with distinctive kinds of content in terms of informational and analytical sophistication. Driven by the demands of the market, the media has produced a differentiated array of sensationalist diversion as well as the kind of rational-critical analysis and information that Habermas treasures. Accordingly, media products should not be judged according to the perceived merits or faults of one particular segment: such universalization produces only a distorted perception of the nature of the communicative environment established by the media.

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In many regards, it can be argued that Habermas doubly overstates his case, in that the discourse of the bourgeois public sphere did not manifest the high level of reasoned discourse that he suggests, and that the situation under advanced capitalism is not as bleak nor locked as he asserts (Dahlgren, 1991, 5). In the latter instance, Habermas has been accused of drawing too heavily upon, if not outright parrotry of, Adorno's and Horkheimer's theses about the mass culture industry and the malleability of their audiences (Keane, 1991, 36). The picture of contemporary individuals as passive spectators enthralled by media spectacles and manipulated by the techniques of public relations management has had a long life in both scholarly and non-scholarly circles alike(10). However, in light of current research on media reception, it is very doubtful whether recipients of media products can be plausibly described as enthralled and manipulated consumers (Thompson, 1995, 74). Indeed, this literature suggests that both the process of reception and the strategies of interpretation utilized by viewers are far more complicated and creative activities than Habermas's account would imply - a point that Habermas readily concedes in his later reflections upon this issue (Habermas, 1992a, 439 & 1996, 377: see also Hall, 1980; Morley, 1986).

One of the criticisms that is frequently levelled against Habermas's account is that by focussing his attention solely on the ***bourgeois*** public sphere, he neglects both the importance and diversity of other forms of discourse and activity that existed in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries(11). Moreover, in one sense Habermas, in the preface of Structural Transformation, does appear to acknowledge the existence of other public spheres. But, this is a specious impression since he qualifies this acknowledgement by suggesting that the ***plebeian*** public sphere was merely a variant of the bourgeois public sphere that shared the same intentions as this sphere and was ultimately "suppressed in the historical process (Habermas, 1989a, xviii)." Critics contend that these contemporaneously developing alternative, 'plebeian', popular, informal or oppositional public spheres were more than mere

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derivatives of bourgeois sociability and were frequently in conflict with the dominant public sphere (see Eley, 1992; Fraser, 1992; Negt & Kluge, 1993). These spheres were usually built upon different institutional forms (trade unions) with different orientating values and objectives (solidarity as opposed to competitive individualism) (Garnham, 1992, 359). Indeed, they were not only excluded from most forms of bourgeois sociability, but were actively opposed to said forms. Throughout its existence the bourgeois public sphere was confronted by populist movements seeking broader inclusivity or attempting to push new issues onto the political agenda that it sought to contain and curtail. Furthermore, Calhoun notes that significant parts of the struggle to establish some of the aspects that Habermas depicts as integral to bourgeois publicity, like freedom of the press, in fact were carried out largely by activists in the plebeian public sphere (Calhoun, 1992, 39: see also Aspinall, 1949; Keane, 1991).

A number of feminist scholars have criticized not only the actual exclusion of women in the bourgeois public sphere, but also Habermas's negligence of this critical point in his consequent evaluation (see Fraser, 1987 & 1992; Landes, 1988; McLaughlin, 1993). In reading Habermas's account it is clear that the historical bourgeois public sphere was restricted to those individuals who had the educational background and financial wherewithal to participate in it. Although Habermas is not unaware of the marginalization of women in the bourgeois public sphere and the patriarchal character of the bourgeois family, it has been argued that he did not appreciate the full significance of this issue (Thompson, 1993, 181). Joan Landes (1988) argues that the exclusion of women from the public sphere was not a matter of historical circumstance, but rather, was constitutive of its very nature. In other words, the bourgeois public sphere was essentially masculinist and this characteristic serves to determine both its self-representation and its subsequent structural transformation (Landes, 1988, 7). Accordingly, this masculinized conception of the public sphere permeated through conceptions of public life and political discussion.

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The public realm was understood as a sphere of reason and universality to which men were thought to be ideally suited: on the other hand, women, whose supposed inclination for frivolous, mannered and theatrical talk was held to have emasculated and weakened political life during the absolutist period, were relegated to the domestic arena (see Landes, 1988 - especially chapters 1 & 2). Although Habermas has conceded that the exclusion of women has a "structuring significance" for the bourgeois public sphere, Fraser has argued that a remarkably comparable case can also be made against Habermas's more recent work (see Fraser, 1987). Fraser stress that "as long as the citizen role is defined to encompass death-dealing soldiering but not life-fostering childrearing, as long as it is tied to male-dominated modes of dialogue, then it ... will remain incapable of including women, fully (Fraser, 1987, 46)."

Be this as it may, Habermas is quite aware of the ambivalence and contradictions present in the ideas and practice of the bourgeois public sphere. He is conscious of the fact that even in the eighteenth century the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere "by no means corresponded to its reality" (Habermas, 1989a, 84). As noted previously, he acknowledges that it rests upon the "fictional" equation of a relatively small, male, privileged reading public with the public at large. As well, he is equally quick at noting the tension between the self-understanding of participants as individuals and the identification of individuals through the fact of their possession of property (see Habermas, 1989a, 79 - 88). Yet he asserts that this model of the public sphere "stood or fell with the principle of universal access" rather than its embodiment (***Op. Cit.***, 85). Moreover, the contradictions between the ideas of equality and universality espoused by liberal doctrine and the exclusiveness and inequalities of the actual practice of the press, salons, clubs does not detract, in Habermas's mind, from the fact that the norms of autonomy, universality of access, plurality of institutions for political participation were ultimately institutionalized as principles, albeit in a flawed manner: "On the basis of the continuing domination of

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one class over another, the dominant class nevertheless developed political institutions which credibly embodied as their objective meaning the idea of their own abolition: *veritas non auctoritas facit legem*, the idea of the dissolution of domination into that easygoing constraint that prevailed on no other ground than the compelling insight of a public opinion (***Op. Cit.***, 88: *emphasis* in original)." As well, Habermas has also acknowledged the validity of these various criticisms developed against his account of the bourgeois public sphere and conceded the need for further reflection on a number of issues as well as the substantial modification of several features of his argument (See Habermas, 1992a & 1992b).

5.3: Media and Representation

However, there is one issue that has not received a great deal of attention in the discussion inspired by Habermas's work that is of consequential significance for any attempt to understand the political role of the media in a democracy. Emphasis in critiques of Habermas's idealization and construction of the bourgeois public sphere have usually focussed on what or who was left out; the overwhelming focus is upon Habermas's interpretation and characterization of factual details in advancing his claims about the nature and progression of the bourgeois public sphere. Under the circumstances, this may leave the impression that the central problem for Habermas's model of publicness is that it needs only to be made more inclusive or accommodating to one or other feature of modern life and demographics. But beyond the question of how the bourgeois public sphere can be made more inclusive, there are still a number of internal, theoretical problems within Habermas's conception of the public sphere.

While what was left out of the bourgeois public sphere is an important concern with significant theoretical and practical dimensions, equally pertinent is the question of what was left in as the underlying model of publicness. The generally

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undifferentiated focus upon issues of historical and theoretical exclusion has meant that Habermas's constituent notion of the public sphere has escaped close scrutiny. As such, any residual tensions or ambiguities within this conception remain unexplored and unexamined. Simply put, Habermas's conception of the public sphere is essentially a dialogical one: it is premised on the understanding that individuals, in one way or another, come together in a shared locale and engage in dialogue with one another as equal partners in a face-to-face conversation (Thompson, 1993, 186). In making the case for the normative value of the rational-critical debate of the public sphere as a primary feature of democracy, the narrative and argument of Structural Transformation treats the publics that had developed in institutions like the coffeehouses, *salons*, and *Tischgesellschaften* as being one and the same as the public held together by the medium of the press and its professional criticism. Habermas understands both *publics* as being constituted through rational-critical communication in a space distinct from the institutions of state or the realm of private family life. More significantly, Habermas overdevelops this dialogical view as being the totality of desirable democratic activity and institutional practice within the public sphere, effectively blurring any distinction that might be made between the disparate types of public sphere institutions: all are subsumed under one umbrella and made into an apparently undivided, unitary whole. Accordingly, his notion of the public sphere creates and implies a set of criteria for democratic deliberation that neither the media nor the public can ever hope to achieve. Consequently, the way in which Habermas conceives and constructs the conceptual landscape of the bourgeois public sphere and the principle of *critical publicity* reveals a model of publicness whose utility and contemporary applicability is, at best, doubtful. Let us consider this matter further by returning to the arguments that Habermas advances in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.

The comparison of the brief moment of critical rationality and the two instances of "representation" that precede and follow it is important for Habermas's

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argument for a number of reasons. At one level it allows Habermas to liken and contrast two rival models of political life: the theatre and the marketplace. Each suggests a dissimilar dynamic and *modus operandi*. In the case of the theatre, the people are the audience, before whom sustained discourse and activity can be portrayed and produced; in the other instance, the people themselves are the actors, but the scripts are less clearly composed or mapped out (Peters, 1993, 546). Habermas's belief that the bourgeois public sphere contains something new and progressive is conveyed, in part, through his contrast of it with the previous historical version of what constituted publicness - the theatrical spectacle of the feudal representative publicity. The value of this flowering of critical rationality is further enhanced by Habermas's depiction of how the bourgeois public sphere has undergone a subsequent *transformation* that has resulted in civil society regaining previously surmounted feudal features: "The 'suppliers' display a showy pomp before customers ready to follow. Publicity imitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity involved in representation (Habermas, 1989a, 195)." The parallel drawn between the two manifestations of representative publicity underscores Habermas's desire to reclaim publicity as a source of rational-critical consensus formation rather than as an occasion for the manipulation of public opinion. It is only in such circumstances that the public realm can become an authority in politics instead of its mere playing field (Calhoun, 1992, 28)(**12**).

The comparison between the differing kinds of publicness existing in the feudal and bourgeois public spheres is also Habermas's means of contending with a tension present in the meaning of the word *public*. Indeed, this ever present tension is only exacerbated by the semantic change affecting understandings of the term *publicity* and the bevy of the words that derive from it, a *transformation* that occurs simultaneous to the structural one that is Habermas's primary focus of attention. Simply put, *public* can mean (and has meant) either spectacle or participation: the

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political and spectacular senses of the term are interwoven together and neither connotation necessarily excludes the meaning of the other. ***Public***, as a term, has a cluster of senses in which it can mean the people as a whole, a place or thing accessible or visible to the public or something that concerns the people as a whole (public matters)(13). This polysemy can lay claim to a long lineage. In Greek and Latin, the concept of public has two principal branches of meaning: **social-political**, in the sense of the political community like the *polis* or the whole body of the people and **visual-intellectual**, in the sense of placing or exhibiting something before the community (Peters, 1995, 7). There is a latent ambiguity in the concept of *public* between it as something that all people are involved in and as something openly visible or known to all people.

Debates about democratic theory and public opinion are predicated on this very point: should the public actively participate in the political process or is it enough that they have access, through instruments like the media, to information and opinion about political issues and decisions (***Op. Cit.***, 14). Habermas's solution is to chronologically divide the meanings of *public*: in his account the representative publicity of the feudal publicness is depicted as being primarily visual-intellectual in orientation, while the bourgeois public sphere is identified as being predominantly social-political in its functions and structure. This division of the senses of *public* does not preclude the possibility that traces of either sense might be found in both forms of publicness. Indeed, the visual-intellectual orientation is seen by Habermas as being a fundamental building block for creating and establishing the necessary foundations for the social-political one. However, Habermas's conception of a democratic public sphere favours and foregrounds a definition of public in which individuals are able to observe the governing of their society's affairs *as well as* being able to participate in this process.

Out of this comparison of the feudal and bourgeois public spheres, Habermas

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advances the claim that the normative value and benefit of the bourgeois public sphere lies in its provision of the mechanisms and institutions by which individuals can participate in the governing of their community. In the feudal public sphere Habermas finds a political structure in which the visual-intellectual sense has enveloped the social-political one. One only has to recall the manner in which Habermas describes representative publicity as being a primarily visual phenomenon whereby the body politic was represented through the spectacular display undertaken by aristocratic elites. The public in the feudal public sphere functions as an audience before whom the various elites display, through their manners, decorum, rhetoric and dress, the symbolic representations of their power and prestige. In Habermas's understanding it is not enough that the public behaves as the *mere* recipients of information and opinion. A key aspect of the emergent critical publicity of the bourgeois public sphere is that it guarantees the connection between public deliberation and the legislative foundation of domination, including the critical supervision of its exercise (Habermas, 1989a, 178).

As opposed to the audience-public of feudal representative publicness, Habermas believes that the public of the bourgeois public sphere functions as an active critical and deliberative body. In this understanding, the visual-intellectual sense of public plays an important role in the bourgeois public sphere to the degree that information and opinion about the actions of the state were to be openly known and available to all participants. More significantly, public also came to refer to an inclusive body of reasoning citizens who were a new form of social collectivity quite distinct from those of the *state* or *commonwealth*. For Habermas, citizens behave as a public body when they confer and discuss in an unrestricted manner about matters of general interest (Habermas, 1974, 136): a public constitutes itself as a public through the process of communication. That this is the case is made especially clear through Habermas's citation of C.W. Mills's criteria for distinguishing between a *public* and a *mass* (see Habermas, 1989a, 250)(14). After making this distinction in

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The Power Elite Mills goes onto make a point that both nicely outlines the differences between a public and a mass and neatly captures the quintessence of Habermas's contrast between the contrasting publics of the feudal and bourgeois public spheres. Mills notes that the public and the mass may be readily differentiated by their primary modes of communication. With a truly and properly functioning public, discussion is the ascendant mean of communication, and the mass media operate so as to enlarge and animate this discussion (Mills, 1956, 304). Whereas in a mass society, communication is dominated by the mass media and the citizenry function as mere markets for the content and products of the media (***Op. Cit.***). Much of Habermas's argument in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere is an elaboration and rumination on this distinction between mass and public.

In contrast to the iconic spectacularity of the feudal public sphere, the bourgeois public sphere relies upon the press as the means by which to convey and symbolize the process of public discussion. For Habermas, the bourgeois embodiment of publicity and *publicness* implies a different kind of dynamic and response on the part of those who experience it. This is because the bourgeois public sphere is a *textual* and legal order premised upon the continued activity and ongoing discussion by its citizenry. This link between text and discussion is a central component of Habermas's understanding of the bourgeois public sphere. Textual representation presupposes activity and discussion on the part of its audience: whereas spectacular display assumes that the audience will watch the production placed before them (Peters, 1995, 10). This is an aspect that Habermas unmistakably emphasizes when discussing the connection between the periodical press and the numerous coffeehouses that emerged simultaneously: "The periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week published a selection (Habermas, 1989a, 42)." The purpose of the newspaper press were not only to inform and make things

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public but to activate and stimulate further discussion. This mirrors a similar point made by Dewey in regards to public opinion. In Dewey's view, public opinion is not formed when individuals possess accurate representations of their environment. It is constituted only in discussion, when these representations, be they opinion or information, are made an active part of the life of the community (Carey, 1989a, 81). It is not sufficient that individuals merely have access to a varied amount of information and opinion: this is simply a precondition for the creation of a true public. As Dewey explains, "ideas which are not communicated, shared, and reborn in expression are but soliloquy, and soliloquy is but broken and imperfect thought. ... The connections of the ear with vital and out-going thought and emotion are immensely closer and more varied than those of the eye (Dewey, 1927, 218)." In Habermas's depiction of the bourgeois public sphere the visual-intellectual sense of public is a step, through the medium of the newspaper, in bringing about a public in which all individuals are involved (the social-political sense). Implicit in the structure of his narrative is the belief that the bourgeois public sphere represents an ideal, if not preferred, form for democracy to take.

As such, it is quite incorrect to argue, as some have done, that the public sphere of representative democratic politics is built upon the same separation of performance and audience that characterizes the structure of theatrical communication (see Carpignano et al, 1993). For Habermas, the feudal and bourgeois models of publicness present divergent means of organizing and exercising political power. In its structural separation between performance and audience, Habermas does not see the representative publicness of the theatre as suggesting a truly *open* social site where citizens can participate in public life. Instead he views it as denoting an instance of spectacle, where things are placed before the public as an **audience** and the exercise of political power is not for or by the people, but **before** them. As opposed to this, the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere holds out the notion that the exercise of power is both visible **before** the public as well as being

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accessible to their analysis, scrutiny and, ultimately, control. Moreover, as mentioned previously, in this situation the exercise of power is justified through a process of rational-critical deliberation. Indeed, Habermas is very suspicious of the highly stylized framework at play in representative spectacle. Pomp and pageantry offer the public an ornate political spectacle without any means or avenues for popular participation: "They draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under 'tutelage' (Habermas, 1989a, 171)." This suspicion on the part of Habermas towards the theatrics that accompany political power, in itself, is not an entirely uncommon perspective. Ever since Machiavelli, political theorists have viewed political symbology, from myth, insignia, and etiquette to palaces, titles and ceremonies as devices by which those who exercise monopoly control over the power of the state conceal and mask their darker purposes and intentions (Geertz, 1980, 122). They are the instruments by which the monopoly control of force is rendered palatable, or at least superficially so. Accordingly, the move back toward to the spectacular as an organizing principle of public life is something that Habermas sees as being inherently undesirable.

For the exercise of power to change from the model of the theatre to that of the market-place is an inherently more democratic and *democratizing* one in Habermas's opinion. Not only does the process of public deliberation place important matters **before** the public, but it also allows every individual in the public to be potentially involved in this discussion. This *public* discussion serves a number of purposes. It allows the specifically bourgeois dialectic of inwardness and publicness, manifest in private, plain, *intimate* forms of self-expression to replace the impersonal, flamboyant role-playing aesthetic of self-presentation that typifies representative publicity (Habermas, 1992a, 426 - 427). Unlike the visually absorbed bearing of representative publicity, the bourgeois public sphere was oriented around language - its textual production, discussion and proclamation (Landes, 1988, 40). The language and rhetoric of the bourgeois public sphere was one of unmasking; it

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was geared towards laying bare the true characteristics of a thing, be it a person or an ideal, by attending to signs of virtue and vice that might be revealed to all by sustained examination. As a result, questions of style moved to the fore as a ground on which symbolic and political battles could be fought. For example, Wollstonecroft celebrates the virtues of reason and utility over feeling and flowery diction, and denounces the "pretty superlatives, dropping glibly from the tongue, (that) vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth (Wollstonecroft, 1985, 82)(15)." The light cast by a newly established critical publicity is seen as an instrument by which to pierce the veil of artificial theatricality and thereby allow reason to triumph over the concerns of style.

Moreover, this discussion was also the means by which the workings of the state could and would be revealed to all as well as being subject, theoretically at least, to their control. Legislation was supposed to be the product of rational agreement and deliberation rather than the force of a secretive political will. As Habermas notes: "Public opinion was in principle opposed to arbitrariness and subject to the laws immanent in a public composed of critically debating private persons in such a way that the property of being the supreme will, superior to all laws, which is to say sovereignty, could strictly speaking not be attributed to it at all. In accord with its own intention, public opinion wanted to be neither a check on power, nor power itself, nor even the source of all powers. Within its medium, rather, the character of executive power, domination (*Herrschaft*) itself, was supposed to change (Habermas, 1989a, 82)." For Habermas political decisions should be the result of a process of rational argumentation by both public and instruments of the state: it is not enough that they receive some form of coverage or analysis - however thorough - in the daily press. In such instances, the resulting vote or decision would not amount to a *public* opinion because two conditions were not fulfilled: informal opinions were not formed rationally, that is, in the conscious grappling with cognitively accessible states of affairs; nor were they formed in discussion, in the pro and con of a public

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conversation (Habermas, 1989a, 221).

The pivotal point in all this is that Habermas's concept of the public sphere is necessarily contingent upon the analytic centrality of reasoned critical discourse. The public sphere as both ideal and reality exists in the active reasoning of the public: a public exists through the interactive discursive exchange of views and information between citizens rather than in an inert mass of people passively receiving and consuming the same media product (Dahlgren, 1995, 50). The critical principle of publicity is "according to its very idea, a principle of democracy not just because anyone could in principle announce, with equal opportunity, his personal inclinations, wishes, and convictions - opinions; it could only be realized in the measure that these personal opinions could evolve through the rational-critical debate of a public into public opinion - *opinion publique* (Habermas, 1989a, 219)." For Habermas, the textual representation of the media is one and the same as the discussion that takes place in the shared locales of the *salons* and coffeehouses. Discussion conducted in person and through the media are equated and measured by essentially the same criteria vis-a-vis the process of public opinion formation. Thus, Habermas's conception of the public sphere is primarily **dialogical** in nature. It is an understanding based on the notion that individuals, in one way or another, come together in a shared locale and engage in dialogue with one another as equal partners in a face-to-face conversation (Thompson, 1993, 186).

Given the primarily dialogical and participatory perspective guiding his conception of the public sphere it is not too surprising that Habermas's assessment of electronic media, like television and radio, is largely negative. The refeudalization of the principle of publicity in contemporary society leads, in Habermas's view, to a situation in which various elites and organizations try to strengthen the prestige and apparent universality of their position without making it the topic of public discussion: the public sphere once again becomes the court where the personages and

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trappings of power are displayed **before** the public rather than one in which debate is carried on. In light of this it is almost inevitable that Habermas's conclusion would be that electronic media foster systematically distorted communication and contribute to an atmosphere of manipulation and domination. For Habermas, these media create a communication situation in which audience reception has become a predominantly private one that removes the ground for communication about what has been appropriated (Habermas, 1989a, 163). The *publicness* of a movie theatre or concert hall is one of informal sociability without the institutional mechanisms to foster the forms of interconnectedness of sociable contacts that previously took place. No public is formed in the context of these group activities. Habermas acknowledges that the tendency toward rational public debate still takes place in the context of and the environment provided by the electronic media - panel discussion, talk shows and so on. But, Habermas contends, while discussion is still carefully cultivated and promoted, it has undergone a fundamental change: it has been turned into yet another consumer item. Today, he observes, "the conversation itself is administered. Professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions, and round table shows - the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a salable package ready for the box office (***Op. Cit.***, 164)."

In the intervening years since the publication of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere Habermas has modified his position on the impact and potential of the electronic media. In the final chapter of his The Theory of Communicative Action (1987), Habermas paints a more ambivalent position in regards to the potential of the media. In this work, Habermas contends that the media both hierarchize and simultaneously remove any restrictions on the horizons of communication. Moreover, the extent to which the media function in either a liberatory and emancipatory fashion cannot be separated from one another and are inherently linked (Habermas, 1987, 390). Yet, it is difficult to see the emancipatory

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possibility within the media since Habermas's model of communication still privileges face-to-face encounters as its ideal (see Habermas, 1996; 1992a; 1992b; 1987).

Many commentators have portrayed Habermas's account of the public sphere as according a significant, if not decisive, role to the print media (see Calhoun, 1992; Carey, 1995; Curran, 1996; Dahlgren, 1995; Garnham, 1986; Peters, 1993; Schudson, 1995; Ward, 1995). For example, in discussing his understanding of the public sphere, Cohen and Arato claim that Habermas distinguishes between the small-group interaction represented by the salon, the coffeehouse, the table society, and the lodge and the extension and generalization of public discourse through the media of communication, above all the press (Cohen & Arato, 1992, 212). They also suggest that the public sphere in Habermas's conception came into being not through the politicization of small-scale face-to-face intimate interaction but through the establishment of a critical audience for literary works by means of newspapers, journals and periodicals. While on the surface, it might appear that Habermas accords print a significant role, a careful re-reading of Structural Transformation reveals that his thinking about print was shaped by a model of communication based on the spoken word: his characterization of the periodical press positions it as part of a conversation begun and continued in the shared locales of bourgeois sociability (Thompson, 1995, 131). Habermas understands writing or publication as being a means by which each *publicist* or scholar can *speak* to or address the world. Writing is like speech and simply one means by which an individual can *address* the world: conversation and publication are conceived of as being a continuous media forming a closed circuit of communication. The press become a voice, albeit a powerful one, like that of one individual's voice in a conversation: essays and articles in the press are treated as being a case of conversation by other means. This bias is especially pronounced in Habermas's discussion of the moral weeklies that he identifies as an "immediate" part of coffeehouse discussions (Habermas, 1989a, 42).

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Habermas's ideal for a *democratic* public resides in a community where citizens engage in talk with each other. Similarly, within this understanding the role of the media is to further and sustain the process of dialogue: Habermas envisions the media achieving this end by being a proxy or extension of public deliberation. He sees the dialogue form that was employed in many of the articles of the periodical and journals associated with the coffeehouses and *salons* as attesting to their proximity to the spoken word. This sense of immediacy conveyed in print is, for Habermas, to all intents and purposes, inseparable from the conversation occurring in the coffeehouses and clubs: "One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to re-enter, via reading, the original conversational medium (Habermas, 1989a, 42)." Accordingly, the model of communication that Habermas uses when discussing the function of print is patterned after the dynamics of face-to-face conversation. As was the case in the Athenian *agora*, in Habermas's understanding the bourgeois public sphere is constituted through speech, in the weighing up of different arguments, opinions and points of view in the dialogical exchange of spoken words in a shared locale (Thompson, 1995, 131). The transposition of the model of communication proposed by face-to-face conversation onto the situation created by print is suggested by Cohen and Arato when they contend that Habermas's thesis is that "the emergence of a political public sphere from critical literary one preserves the principle of unconstrained communication originally established in the intimate sphere of the new family type (Cohen & Arato, 1992, 215 - 216)." But, they, like Habermas, do not examine the possible ambiguity that might result from the extrapolation of a conversational model of communication to the kind of communication situation created by media like the newspaper press. Consequently, the resulting conception does not adequately consider the extent to which the interposition of the media *transforms* the nature of the public sphere. More to the point, Habermas overstates the unity between print and conversation. In ascribing a particular set of duties to the media, Habermas links these duties to a particular vision of both democracy as well as the form of

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deliberation that must take place within this framework.

It could be maintained that this overstatement suggests the need for a slight revision and emendation of the manner in which Habermas characterizes the intellectual history and milieu of the public sphere. But, it can be more forcefully asserted that this inflation suggests that Habermas's conception of the media as an institution of a *discussing public* is overdrawn and erroneous in its depiction of the central raison d'etre of the press. This is especially the case given that Habermas's argument pivots on the creation and continuance through the media of a form of deliberation that is essentially dialogical in nature. It is an understanding that sees the media as being a means by which to extend and expand the discussion that takes place in the context a face-to-face situation. But such a degree of unity between print and conversation is only really possible and feasible in small-scale situations like the New England town hall or the Athenian *agora*. In large scale circumstances like that of contemporary - or even nineteenth century - nation states, the continuity and conformity between talking and writing is not as harmonious nor as workable as Habermas would appear to assume. Moreover, the dialogical model of communication is based on certain conditions that, given the complexities, circumstances and logistics involved in both modern media and nation states, are increasingly remote from the actual circumstances of public discourse. It is not just simply a case of practical obstacles that need to be overcome. At a theoretical level, the question of scale makes both participation and mediation issues that need to be dealt with and incorporated into any assessment of the political role of the media. The role of mediated communication cannot be interpreted as an extended form of face-to-face communication: the forms of publicness and communication that it engenders are de-spatialized, non-dialogical and representational in character.

While the ideal examples of deliberation are based on face-to-face situations such as the Athenian *agora*, New England town halls, or legislative bodies, the

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likelihood of realistically achieving such a form of deliberation in large complex nation states with millions of citizens is generally conceded to be next to impossible. The mandates of logic and practical necessity dictate that in order for deliberation to be carried out in a democratic fashion the choice is between drastically decentralizing deliberation by carrying it out in many separate small groups of citizens (Page, 1996, 4), or adapting politics to large-scale societies through institutions of representation: political parties, elected representatives and full-time bureaucratic apparatuses (Garnham, 1992, 366). In practice, the general tendency has been to adapt democratic practice through the introduction of representative structures. For advocates of direct democracy such a manoeuver has always been viewed as suspect and an abjuration of authentic democratic expression and practice. However, whatever the alienation and peril involved in their operation, the establishment of representative structures of government offer, as Nicholas Garnham remarks, "a liberating gain rather than any sort of loss of supposed preexisting authenticity" in that it is a form of government, unlike systems of direct democracy, that does not over-politicize life or turn into a tyranny that leaves little time for the leading of private, autonomous personal lives (Garnham, 1992, 366).

Nevertheless, understandings of the operation of the media have remained enmeshed within the paradigm of the direct individual face-to-face communication (Garnham, 1992, 367). Although there is no inherent restriction on the potential size of a reading public, a model based on face-to-face dialogue like Habermas's discursive public is subject to *natural* limits in terms of the size and numbers of those realistically able to participate. Given the capacity and capability of present communications technology the problem is not one of geographic size, or the widespread dispersal of the population (Page, 1996, 3). Rather, the more significant and perhaps insurmountable problem is that a large number of citizens would have to interact together. Current communications technology, be it computer or television, can "connect" a large number of people so that they might view, listen or

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read the same material. However, any form of *conversation*, communication or interaction that might occur is limited by the capabilities of the technology. Even with the most sophisticated medium only a finite number of people can communicate to one another at the same time. As such, this mirrors the situation that occurs when a group of people gather together in some shared locale to have a conversation or discussion. As the numbers of participants keep expanding, at some point not everyone will be able to be speak and be heard (Peters, 1993, 564). Once this finite amount is reached and surpassed the resulting conversation would more than likely be unintelligible to both observer and participant alike or be of too long and unwieldy a duration if all were to be permitted to have their say. In addition, the limits of human attention mean that only one speaker at a time could be "listened" to by everyone else (Page, 1996, 4). If such "meetings" were structured so as to allow every individual to have their say they would only have a very small amount of time to make their views known and would have to wait a long time to do so. In these circumstances, citizens would be left with little time outside of these meetings for leading private, autonomous personal lives (Garnham, 1992, 366). The same is the case with the media, be it in electronic or print form. Once an inflection point is reached most of the participants become spectators. As well, such a moment is determined, in part, by the specific logistical and technical components involved in the particular media form in terms of the production of it as *product*: editorial deadlines, production schedules and considerations.

In terms of mediation, Habermas assumes a continuity between speech and print that fails to fully consider and appreciate the ***mediated*** character of discourse conducted through print. This occurs in spite of his examination and incorporation of thinkers into his argument whose work acknowledges, however slightly, the degree of mediation present in the nature and flow of public discourse conveyed through print. On this point, Habermas's argument follows in the footsteps of Kant's characterization of the process of Enlightenment, the public use of reason. But in so

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doing he overlooks a slight nuance that is present in Kant's position. Like the position sketched by Kant in An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784), Habermas believes that the public sphere was not realized in the *republic of scholars* alone but in the public use of reason by all who were adept at it (Habermas, 1989a, 105). But Habermas does not appreciate the full significance of Kant's position in terms of how it suggests an impact upon the process of public deliberation by the mediated nature of expression through print. Those members of the public who were neither scholars nor philosophers but were adept at the public use of their reason were expected to emerge from the confines of their private spheres as if they were scholars. Kant is fairly explicit on this point (the following passage is, it should be noted, the one that Habermas cites on this point):

> By the public use of one's own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*. What I term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular *civil* post or office with which he is entrusted. ... It is, of course, impermissible to argue in such cases; obedience is imperative. But in so far as this or that individual who acts as part of a machine also considers himself as a member of a complete commonwealth or even cosmopolitan society, and thence as a man of learning who may through his writings address a public in the truest sense of the word, he may indeed argue without harming the affairs in which he is employed for some of the time in a passive capacity (Kant, 1991, 55: *emphasis* in original).

In making public use of their reason, individuals must learn to speak "like scholars" when addressing the reading public or world at large. That is, individuals need to address the reading public in an appropriate *public* voice - one that is quite distinct from the voice that they may use when speaking in private. For both Kant and Habermas, the public would best develop its own reason by fashioning its discussion of the matters and issues of common interest after the debate that took place between those concerned with the principles of pure reason - scholars and philosophers. The critical conflict of academy presented a model worthy of emulation in terms of the

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convention and modes of address that the public use of reason should duplicate so as to further the cause of enlightenment: as Habermas notes "just as the discussion of the philosophers took place in full view of the government, to instruct it and give it things to consider, so too did it occur before the 'people', to encourage it in the use of its own reason (Habermas, 1989a, 105)." It was not so much the scholarly thrust as it was the overall tone and dynamics of this debate that presented an ideal model for the public to copy and imitate in their *public* use of reason.

The more significant point in Kant's understanding of the *public* use of reason is that print was not simply perceived as a means of personal extension. That is to say, mediated communication was understood to be a different order of things than either face-to-face communication or a extended form of it. Addressing the world at large through writing entailed a communicative act and voice, as well as an understanding of both, very distinct from the conversational one: speaking to the abstract, general principle as a scholar, required individuals to adopt an impersonal, disinterested civic voice. Individuals did not speak in the context of their particular situation, but from a more impersonal and assumed stance as scholar and 'person of learning': the assumption of this *public* voice for the expression of various concerns and criticisms necessitated that the sum and substance of private identity be parenthesized. What a person had to say would not carry force because of who they were but in spite of who they were (Warner, 1993, 34). Such a public disposition allowed individuals the freedom to address a "reading" public that was potentially indefinite: it permitted a routine form of self-abstraction through the adoption of a disembodied public persona like that of "scholar". Writers, since they could not assume that they necessarily shared a common context with their readers, needed to spell out their assumptions in order to be more convincing. As well, writers were not constrained by the same limitations present in face-to-face conversation: they can develop and present a long-linked complex argument since readers can, if necessary, re-read an essay (Gouldner, 1976, 42). Print divested an author's voice from the

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idiosyncrasies of expression; rules of grammar, the act of reading, the strictures of argumentation and the conventions of print as a technology dictated that individuals structure and develop their commentary and criticism within certain boundaries so as to facilitate the delivery of their point with a reasonable degree of clarity to and impact upon the reader(16). Writing fosters a more careful and structured style of discourse as opposed to the more casual and compact styles of discourse that are tolerated in oral communication (***Op. Cit.***). In communicating in this fashion writers shifted focus onto the content and coherence of their argument rather than on the particularities of their individuality and situation: an act of concentration not always feasible within the localized context and immediacy of face-to-face conversation or argument.

Habermas recognized that questions of status were bracketed in the bourgeois public sphere and, in fact, portrayed this status-blind social intercourse as one of its crucial feature: "The parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy and in the end can carry the day meant, in the thought of the day, the parity of 'common humanity' (Habermas, 1989a, 36)." Although such a cultural perspective is acknowledged by Habermas as part and parcel of the public sphere, its greater and theoretically richer meaning is diluted when strictly conjoined to a dialogical model. In assuming a relatively harmonious connection between speech and writing, Habermas overlooks the degree to which the perception of modes of communication changed with the intercession of the print media. The simultaneous shift in the perception of printed objects and awareness of their potentially limitless audience signalled the development and emergence of an entirely unique way of understanding the *publicness* of publication. More importantly, such an conception points towards a way of conceiving the political function of the media that avoids the theoretical ambiguity and cul-de-sac involved in Habermas's dialogical model.

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The nature of mediated social relations cannot be equated with the nature of social relations experienced at the face-to-face level. The question of whether mass communications technologies enhance or constrain democracy will always tend to be answered negatively (or at least tinged with a strong pessimism) if democracy is conceived of in terms of the dynamics existing in the context of face-to-face conversational interaction. However, this was not, as Habermas would have it, the position generally adopted by Enlightenment intellectuals in regards to the medium of print. Initially, print was seen as a means of extending direct, interactive dialogue but this conception gradually gave way to an understanding of it as a form of deliberative monologue in which the attention of both writers and readers is focussed upon printed objects or to its words and ideas (Warner, 1993). As print became understood as a depersonalized and decontextualized form of communication, communication through it became "a kind of ghostly, disembodied voice separated from its speaker" (Gouldner, 1876, 44). If anything, this suggests an understanding of the political role of the media that removes it from being explicitly linked with the creation and sustenance of a strict dialogical exchange between dispersed citizenry. Accordingly, it might be far more productive to view the media as a medium of civic representation and self-reflection rather than participation. The media should be seen less as an agent of direct democratic discussion and more as a technology of publicity by which ideas, information and images are placed before the public.

The extension and generalization of public discourse through the media of communication - print or electronic - does not replicate the dynamics and symbolic exchange that characterizes small-group interaction. Contrary to Habermas's belief, few individuals can re-enter, via reading (or viewing) "the original conversational medium" as participants. The discussions that take place in the media and those that take place in their places of reception are vastly different. While both may touch upon the same topics and points, the manner in which these issues are pursued, portrayed and analysed are subject to differing degrees of rigour, organization and

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complexity: for instance, the decontextualized nature of discourse through print strengthens the author's orientation to their grammar and focuses their attention on discourse as embodied in printed objects (Gouldner, 1976, 43). Likewise, the more casual and multi-modal communicative nature of face-to-face conversation produces an altogether distinct kind of communication: since participants can both see and hear each other communication and interpretation is facilitated (and occasionally complicated) by gestures, voice inflection, manner, and facial expressions. Although the scattered members of either a newspaper or television audience can discuss amongst themselves what they see or read, the resulting conversation lacks a central place of assembly or sense of collectivity. In transmitting various messages, ideas and images the media provide a central location for its dispersed audience to register its content. The peculiarly self-reflexive constitution of the ***mediated*** public sphere is noted by Habermas: "The public that read and debated this sort of thing read and debated about itself (Habermas, 1989a, 43)." The civic and emancipatory character of the media, in relation to the public sphere, lies in its ability to constitute and distinguish a community to itself: it creates a collective image of the collective in spite of the de-spatialized nature of the community. The role of the newspaper is one of publishing information and opinion: the public and community are created through the transcending of geographic space and distance. In reading newspapers, the public reads about itself, and consequently discovers ways to come into existence (Peters, 1995, 16). The public sphere constituted through the media gathers together the dispersed individuals of nation states and, as Arendt observed, prevents their falling over each other (Arendt, 1958, 52). Indeed, this is frequently the most celebrated aspect of the press: there is the manner in which Alexis de Tocqueville acclaims a newspaper as the means by which "the same thought" is placed before a thousand readers "at the same time" (Tocqueville, 1966, 517). Or, there is the celebration of the press by Stead as the "visible speech if not the voice of democracy" and as the "phonograph of the world" (Stead, 1886b, 656).

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As media technologies, be they electronic or print, are introduced and incorporated into the process of political communication, they gradually change the manner in which political communication is understood and perceived. The electronic media, like the print media before it, do not defile or sabotage the possibility of political deliberation. In his depiction of the role of the press, Habermas understands and portrays them as being an institution that had evolved out of the public's use of its reason and that functioned as an extension of this debate (Habermas, 1989a, 183). As a result, Habermas believes that the press, as an institution of the discussing public, were primarily concerned with and geared towards asserting the latter's critical function (***Op. Cit.***, 185). However, the central problem with Habermas's understanding is that he sees the formation of reasoned judgement as having a privileged relationship with the dialogical model of communication. Yet, the media do not operate in a fashion that extends and expands the realm of dialogue. In part, this is a result of their adaption to the practical circumstances of contemporary nation states as well as the kind of communication and discourse that they foster. Instead, they create a more impersonal, less conversational form of communication that nevertheless still allows for a give and take of information and opinion well beyond the capability of a physical gathering of citizens. The resulting role is far less dialogical and participatory in its nature, and more ***representational*** in character.

Accordingly, this raises what might be considered an ontological objection to Habermas's theory of the public sphere in terms of the specific reality claimed for the public sphere and the objects, institutions and practices within it: Habermas's attempt to delineate the public sphere in terms of a specific form of interaction and the symbolic exchange appropriate to it needs to be reconsidered and revised. Habermas privileges ones historical moment, and the corresponding theoretical understanding that he derives from this, and totalizes it as the ideal model for the public sphere to follow. However, doing so only serves to distort and undervalue the

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true impact and functioning of the media, be it in the form of print or the electronic technologies. The scale of modern nation states requires that the practice of democratic politics be adapted through the introduction of representative structures, in both the political and symbolic senses of the concept. The need for both institutional as well as aesthetic representation within modern nation states in order to prevail over the problem of scale is alluded to by John Stuart Mill:

> In the ancient world, though there might be, and often was, great individual or local independence, there could be nothing like a regulated popular government beyond the bounds of a single city-community; because there did not exist the physical conditions for the formulation and propagation of a public opinion, except among those who could be brought together to discuss public matters in the same agora. This obstacle is generally thought to have ceased by the adoption of the representative system. But to surmount it completely, required the press, and even the newspaper press, the real equivalent, though not in all respects an adequate one, of the Pnyx and the Forum (Mill, 1972b, 193).

Representation has long been the response of democratic thinkers to the question of scale: in The Federalist Papers (1987), "*Publius*" argued that the scale of modern polities required representation since assemblies of the whole nation were effectively ruled out of the question by factors of geography and transportation. The point being made by Mill is that democracy is made possible in a geographically extended territory through two kinds of representation: political in the sense of elected officials who represent the citizenry in some form of national assembly; and symbolic in the sense of the media which represents (or re-presents) political affairs and issues to the public (Peters, 1995, 15). Participation by and involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of government is not a feasible or practical option in modern societies: however, through the mechanisms and institutions of representation the citizenry have some say in the process of public decision-making through the delegation of their political functions to a elected group of officials as well as having this process of governance made public and known to all through the media. The various

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institutions of representative government (political parties, elected officials and full-time bureaucratic apparatuses) by themselves are not enough to surmount the mechanical difficulties that impede popular government in a geographically dispersed territory. The symbolic representation provided by the media is also necessary so as to place the actions and intentions of these institutions in a common context for all to see and understand. Without such a context, Mill notes, representative institutions are of little value and may become instruments of intrigue and tyranny if the generality of electors are insufficiently interested in their own government to vote, or if they vote at all, to do so in a responsible fashion (Mill, 1972b, 192).

Acting as an institution of symbolic representation, the impact of the media is such that they establish a public sphere that is less of a dialogical encounter between citizens and shifts its overall character in the direction of monological representation (Dahlgren, 1995, 92). Not surprisingly, as political competition has immersed and adapted itself to the technology and logic of the media, dominance in the semiotic environment has often been acquired by various political and economic elites. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while the power holders control the shape of the message sent to the recipients, they do not control the entire communicative context: the settings in which the recipient listens or views, is beyond the control of the producers (Scannell, 1989, 149). Likewise, the interpretation given to a particular message by the recipients is equally beyond their control and by no means automatically guaranteed to ensure the furtherance of a particular interest or position. Nonetheless, for all the disadvantages and problems inherent in the communicative context established by the media, there is a considerable dividend to be realized through the intervention and mediation of the electronic media - enhanced visibility and accessibility. Television, for example, places things before the public and makes thing public in the visual-intellectual sense: it does this with a speed and scope that readily eclipses the ability of the newspaper press.

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This is an aspect of their impact and function that even Habermas concedes. In his introduction (translated into English in 1992) to the unrevised reprinting of the eighteenth German edition of Structural Transformation, Habermas remarks that the revolutionary events of 1989

> occurring in Czechoslovakia, and in Romania formed a chain of events properly considered not merely as a historical process that happened to be shown on television but one whose very *mode of occurrence* was televisional. The mass media's worldwide diffusion had not only a decisive infectious effect. In contrast with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the physical presence of the masses demonstrating in the squares and streets was able to generate revolutionary power only to the degree to which television made its presence ubiquitous (Habermas, 1992a, 456).

Instead of being a corruption of democracy and a defilement of rational communication, the altered, electronically expanded form of political communication reflects the reality of the expanded territorial nature of industrial society. Before broadcasting public life consisted of those public spaces and buildings where people could meet for a variety of purposes - relaxation, pleasure or self-improvement. Those public events that did take place were at a particular place for a particular audience: a concert hall, political lecture, sporting event, church or civic or state ceremony were open to those who could get there and afford (where necessary) the price of entry (Scannell, 1989, 140). By the agency of various "electronic" technologies of mass communication *public* events acquire an audience far larger than those who are immediately present. At the same time, the "intervention" of television transforms what had previously been understood as being "public" by taking already public events and making them even more public (Meyrowitz, 1985, 287). The intercession of electronic media, like television, increase the number of witnesses, regardless of whether they were at the actual location of said incident or in a locale spatially removed from the original place(17). Furthermore, in doing this the media provide a new kind of access to virtually the whole spectrum of public life:

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political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainments are placed in a common domain, open and accessible to all (Scannell, 1989, 140). Public life was, in effect, opened by the intercession of the electronic media. The backdrop of day-to-day life now incorporates, through television and radio, a whole stratum of events and information that were previously not available to large sections of the population(18). The public is presented with a symbolic representation by which to gain a sense of itself as a *people* or *public* in lieu of the, logistically impossible, physical assembly of the entire populace.

The question of representation has a peculiar place within Habermas's theory of the public sphere. On the one hand, the narrative contained within Structural Transformation describes the emergence of a set of ideas and practices that are constituent parts of the institutions and constitutional norms of representative democracy. In the introduction to the reprinting of the eighteenth German edition of Structural Transformation, Habermas makes clear that his conception of democracy has risen above the lingering Athens-envy that has haunted democratic theory for so long: "If there still is to be a realistic application of the idea of sovereignty of the people to highly complex societies, it must be uncoupled from the concrete understandings of its embodiment in physically present, participating, and jointly deciding members of a collectivity (Habermas, 1992a, 451)."

However, Habermas's thinking was not as advanced as this when he wrote Structural Transformation. In Structural Transformation Habermas's vision of democracy is one that is direct, participatory and deeply suspicious of representative government and its institutions. In discussing Mill and Tocqueville's shared conception of *representative government* Habermas characterizes this idea as being a diminution of the public sphere. It was, he believes, the case that Mill's argument for the protection of private autonomy and the freedom of minorities from the majority is simply a means by which the opinion and interests of "materially

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independent citizens" secures an influence for itself against the "tyranny" of the unenlightened and propertyless public of the masses. The idea of a critically debating public was to be augmented with elements of representative publicity so that "an esoteric public of representatives could emerge (Habermas, 1989a, 137)." Quoting directly from Mill, Habermas observes that the public was to be satisfied with deciding upon the character and talents of the persons that they elect to decide social and political questions for them, than upon the questions themselves (***Op. Cit.***). Representation was a means by which "public opinion" was "purified" by means of the authoritative insights of materially independent citizens. This "purification" was further entrenched by the growing interdependence of the editorial and advertising sections of the newspaper press: a process in which the press "(until then an institution of private people insofar as they constituted a public) became an institution of certain participants in the public sphere in their capacity as private individuals; it became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere (***Op. Cit.***, 185)."

For Habermas institutions of political and symbolic representation function, both before and after the transformation of the public sphere, to bring about the public's acceptance of social relations as they are. Within the literature this type of conclusion - expressed with varying levels of sophistication and empirical purchase - has spurred calls for a media that would once again spark and engage the critical rational capacity of the public. At times, this has amounted, as Michael Schudson has observed, to call for a kind of schizophrenia on the part of the news media. The duties the media are to perform are schizophrenic in the sense that they are to act as if the vision of classical democracy was within reach and simultaneously to work as if a large, informed and involved electorate was not possible (Schudson, 1995, 223). Whatever the case, the media are called upon to stop treating individuals as a "market" for "product" and instead relate to them as public that needs to be educated to be shrewd observers of politics and engaged in the political process as enthusiastic

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participants: the central issue is thought to be one of realizing the emancipatory and democratizing potential that is believed to lie within the media.

Yet the exact manner in which the media are to achieve this goal or play such a role is not altogether clear. More to the point, the more crucial question is how will such a reconstituted discourse within the media necessarily lead to an increase in political action and participation on the part of the public? In turn this leads to a number of related questions along the same line of thought. For instance, on what grounds or in what circumstances can we expect the media to promote either compliance or resistance? By what means? The answers to these questions, or at least the usual ones that are offered, do little to provide a satisfactory response at one important theoretical, if not practical, level. Whether the public is fed a steady diet of spectacle or rational-critical opinion on social-political concerns, they are still engaged in the same kind of relationship with the media in each instance. The media produce some form of product, be it diversionary or socially committed, and the public receives and consumes it depending upon the contingency of individual taste and need. The active textual interpretation celebrated by some in the field of cultural studies may sometimes have political consequences, but it is not the same thing as being in a common forum with the producers of said texts (Peters, 1995, 17). An audience of active receivers does not inevitably lead to or entail political action or engagement within the larger political process.

Whether the media engender an ingenious or ingenuous audience does not irrevocably constitute the totality or possibility of political participation. Although the media play an important part in the process of political communication they are not the definitive or only arenas in which the cultural resources for effective citizenship are constructed and maintained. Indeed, the media function more as institutions of public representation than as avenues of political participation. Assessing the potential and actual practice of the public's political participation

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requires that a delineation and differentiation be made between the several different sorts of institutions that exist within the public sphere (19). In terms of their place in people's lives the media are perhaps the most common and familiar of these institutions. In this role, the media offer the public a diverse selection of commodified units of information, entertainment and diversion: these units take a number of disparate forms including books, magazines, and newspapers as well as the electronic media with their range of news programs, sporting events, and entertainment productions (Mann, 1990, 87). As Simonds observes "political information is but one part of a package that includes weather reports, sports and entertainment reviews, travel advice, cooking instructions, astrological charts, lottery results, love, sex, and manners counseling, crossword puzzles, comic strips, and, of course, much else (Simonds, 1989, 200)." Yet, it bears stressing that within this polymorphous mixture of entertainment-orientated public sphere institutions there exists a number of avenues of artistic and theoretical expression such as conferences, specialized books and periodicals that epitomize the rational-critical character so prized by Habermas (Mann, **Ibid.**). The provision of information about social and political matters is only part of what the media do. But, this mixture within the media of both diversion and information does not mean that one orientation cancels or overwhelms the other. Consequently, just as the extent to which "political" views might be derived from "entertainment" sources cannot be *underestimated* or neglected, the extent to which the "information" component of the media functions as a political educator should not be *overestimated* or unduly stressed (Simonds, 1989, 200).

Be this as it may, the media, whatever their orientation, do not exhaust the totality of institutions available within the public sphere. There also exists a number of other institutions and realms that provide particular and localized discursive spaces for individuals to exchange views and opinions about a wide range of social and political matters. These arenas of public discourse arise within various concrete

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institutional settings, within schools, work places, residential committees, political organizations, juries, voluntary associations, political parties and so on (Mann, 1990, 87). More than anything else these are the sites in which the potential and actuality of concrete dialogical deliberation and political participation and action can occur. Habermas's conception of the public sphere is a universalistic one that emphasizes the public sphere's role in relating to ***the public*** at large, while ignoring the particular, localized political and social sites and arenas which make up the State (***Op. Cit.***, 88). Yet, these arenas are the primary sites for political discourse: as compared to the media, they are far more accessible and penetrable, at an every day and practical level, by individual citizens. More importantly, these localized spaces are required for the preparation of citizenship on levels where participation are still possible in modern societies (Cohen & Arato, 1992, 230). This is one of the key aspects that Habermas overlooks in his dismissal of Tocqueville's stress on voluntary associations as the intermediary bodies required for the stabilization of differentiation and the establishment of democratic mediation (***Op. Cit.***). In Tocqueville's theory civil and political associations provide the forum in which individuals can both "learn some habits of acting together in the affairs of daily life" as well as acquire the "power of carrying through great enterprises by themselves" (Tocqueville, 1966, 514). By themselves, the media are incapable and unsuited towards providing this kind of training or preparation. Individuals gain an understanding of and allegiance to the political system only through a process of sociological and educational habituation (Spragens, 1990, 205). The media are a component in this process of habituation, but by no means the central or defining element.

However, Habermas treats the media as the "pre-eminent" institution of the public sphere. For such a conception the entertainment orientation of newspapers and electronic media constitutes the erosion of an integral element in the rational-critical nature of the public sphere (See Habermas, 1989a; Hart, 1994; Herbeck, 1999; Kellner, 1990; Murdock, 1992; Parenti, 1986; Postman, 1985; Sartori, 1989;

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Whillock, 1999). The continuing predominance of this somewhat selective view perhaps reflects the powerful and enduring influence of classical liberal theory, which conceives of 'the press' primarily as a political medium with important functions within a liberal democracy (Curran et al, 1980, 288). Despite the prevalence and magnetism of this view, there is a growing understanding that the provision of "political or other serious" information is not the only function carried out and fulfilled by the media (cf. Curran et al, 1980; Connell, 1991; Sparks, 1991). Any "pre-eminence" ascribed to the media needs to be qualified in two ways. First, the pursuit of information is not the sole reason why people use and consume the various types of media product that they do; frequently, the media are utilized as sources of entertainment and diversion. Secondly, if the media have a "pre-eminent" position they do so because of their position as a mechanism of publicity - in the sense of making things visible to all. Any political information that the media convey to their audience is mutually constituted by both the media and the political system. The norms and routines of professional journalism in this regard are not defined in respect to some abstract measure or conception of "news" but rather in relation to concrete political structures and the political culture of a given society (Schudson, 1995, 31). Too exclusive a focus upon the media as an institution of the public sphere potentially overlooks the degree to which the information conveyed and role played by the media has been shaped and moulded by the presence and workings of other governmental and non-governmental institutions. As well, such a distorted perspective also overestimates the significance of the media's position in the process of deliberation by overlooking the particular, localized arenas of public discourse.

Consequently, the media need to be seen less as an agent by which a communal sentiment or decision is actively and directly created by each individual within a participatory public sphere, and more as a means of civic representation and self-reflection. Doing so does not mean that any consideration of the media as a deliberative mechanism within the political process is negated or down-played.

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Instead, it means that the manner in which deliberation is understood needs to be revised. In its ideal form, deliberation is thought to provide for a space of public discourse through which "various groups and individuals may consider their respective and collective wants and possibly modify them (Calhoun, 1988, 227)." By means of the give and take of information and opinion, citizens have the opportunity "for acquiring an understanding of means and ends, of one's interests and the expected consequences of policies for interests, not only for oneself but for all other relevant persons as well. Insofar as citizen's good or interests requires attention to a public good or general interest, then citizens ought to have the opportunity to acquire an understanding of these matters (Dahl, 1989, 112)." Through the instrumentality of deliberation, and the reflection it may subsequently prompt, individuals "not only can discover that their underlying interests differ from their previous preferences but also, by creating themselves anew, can create new interests (Mansbridge, 1993, 97)(**20**)." However, it is not inevitably the case that a deliberative conception of democracy needs to or must be a dialogical conception: there is, as Thompson notes, no good grounds for assuming that face-to-face conversation is, by itself, more conducive to deliberation than the process of reading a book or watching a television program (Thompson, 1995, 256). Mediated communications provide individuals with an access to a diversity of knowledge and information that they would otherwise not have: in providing individuals with this information the media can stimulate deliberation as much, if not more than, face-to-face conversation and argumentation.

The media are part of the process in that they furnish a wide range of information and opinion, but they are not necessarily the central site in which deliberation occurs. In their everyday lives, individuals are presented with a number of other particular and localized avenues and opportunities for public discourse besides the media. The public sphere is made up of a number of intermediary institutions and organizations that vary in terms of their practical and thematic

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accessibility to the public. All of these intermediary structures, nevertheless, are relatively porous to one another in the sense that, within the national context, all are shaped by the particular institutional logic and practice that exists in such a system. In Between Facts and Norms (1996) Habermas recognizes that the public sphere is differentiated into a variety of avenues or "levels"

> according to the density of communication, organizational complexity and range - from the *episodic* publics found in taverns, coffee houses, or on the streets; through the *occasional* or "arranged" publics of particular presentations and events, such as theater performances, rock concerts, party assemblies, or church congresses; up to the *abstract* public sphere of isolated readers, listeners, and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media. Despite these manifold differentiations, however, all the partial publics constituted by ordinary language remain porous to one another. The one text of "the" public sphere, a text continually extrapolated and extending radially in all directions, is divided by internal boundaries into arbitrarily small texts for which everything else is context; yet one can always build hermeneutical bridges from text to the next (Habermas, 1996, 374: *emphasis* in original).

Such a division is a useful means of discriminating between different segments or portions of the public sphere. However, while all these "partial publics" are "porous to one another" and akin to small texts which can be joined together through the building of "hermeneutical bridges", the creation of each "partial public's" text is subject to distinct and separate processes with correspondingly different forms of interaction and relationships between text and "reader". The discussion and communication of a group of people in a direct face-to-face situation is markedly different from the interaction and relationship that a spatially and temporally dispersed set of readers or audience might have. Habermas holds that while these different levels are differentiated according to "functional specifications, thematic foci, policy fields, and so forth", they are still accessible to lay-persons (***Op. Cit.***, 373). This is not in doubt. But the kind of accessibility that a "lay-person" might

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have is determined in part by the density and kind of communication that takes place. In some instances the accessibility will be of a participatory nature, while in the more "abstract" public sphere, there will be a sharp degree of separation between a limited set of actor/participants and a larger set of observer/spectators. Such a situation is not an abjuration of the democratic public sphere or the role of the public, but rather an accommodation of the process of political deliberation to the reality of modern nation states and communication technologies.

A dialogical conception of the public sphere that sees it as being constituted primarily by speech introduces a tension into an understanding or theory of democratic discussion and the kinds of social relations established by it. A conceptualization of the press as instruments of extended face-to-face dialogue attempts to map the normative substance and goals of direct democratic practice onto structures that are primarily representational in form and content. Habermas's conception of the public sphere transposes, or at least attempts to, the context and model of communication found in episodic publics onto the abstract one. However, such an understanding introduces an unavoidable tension between the practical aims and normative thrust of how deliberation and discussion is understood in the public sphere. On the one hand the practical aim of deliberation is to establish and institutionalize manageable means of facilitating discussion in an orderly and coherent fashion so as to achieve some form of consensus or common understanding as the end product. On the other hand, the normative thrust strives towards allowing all to participate, subjecting every issue to continuous examination and possible reformulation. As such the continual reexamination and reformulation of all political conflicts would appear to undermine the relevance and authoritativeness of the procedure established by the practical aim. In doing this, Habermas's ideal of what the public sphere should be and how it should operate serves only to distort the nature and dynamics of the institutional structure within the public sphere. Far from being the central arena in which public deliberation takes place, the media provides

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the dispersed citizenry a means of gathering together and relating to one another.

From its earliest incarnation in arguments for and about the "liberty of the press" a central duty prescribed to the media has involved the creation and investiture of the public as a specific kind of political entity: a rational, participatory citizenry. For instance, in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas sees "the mandate of a political public sphere" as being one "in which the public is to set in motion a *critical* process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it (Habermas, 1989a, 232: *emphasis* in original)." To this end, theories about the media and democracy have been, at one level, attempts to integrate mass participation into the process of decision-making without undermining an overriding principle of rationality. Accordingly, the manner in which the media sustain and shape this mass participation has been the subject of a great deal of attention in regards to the perceived passivity and/or activeness of the audience. A normative and critical stress has been placed upon the media as a key site in the development and perpetuation of a democratic society: the media are positioned as central instruments and resources for the public in the performance of their function as citizenry. In particular, attention has revolved around the ways in which the media not only disseminate opinion but also influence the formation, expression and consumption of public opinion within the public (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, 9). Beyond considerations of whether they adequately provide and circulate information, the media are also called upon to provide a forum for public discourse: an environment in which an informed and participatory citizenry can be brought about and assembled within the confines of both the political process and day-to-day life (Calhoun, 1988, 234).

Habermasian discussions about the political function of the media are, in part, discussions about the constitution of a public that is capable of performing and fulfilling the duties and normative claims that democratic theory invests in them. An

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overriding concern is that the public be given the opportunity and means to develop and constitute itself in an suitably rational-critical manner. Consequently, a central thrust within the critical literature is that the media *should* construct a role for the citizen that emphasizes and features qualities and properties suitable to the needs of democracy. This sense of anxiety is especially pronounced since the current level of technological and institutional arrangements makes it far easier to constitute a democratic society as a collective of spectators than as an association of participating actors (Peters, 1995, 27). The image of the public as a group of spectators watching the political process from the sidelines is a worrisome one because it goes against much of the rhetoric and touchstones of democratic theory: the reasoning public, the primacy of open and critical conversation, the potential of emancipation through the utilization of collective reason (Peters, 1993, 559). In the Habermasian literature on the media and democracy, the underlying anxiety is that a public allowed only to watch an unfolding political spectacle will be insufficiently rational and prepared to participate in the political system. As Dewey notes, "vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meaning it purveys pass from mouth to mouth (Dewey, 1927, 219)." The next chapter will examine the prevalent construction in the pertinent literature of the public and its imputed relationship with the media.

As a political invention and agent, the public or citizenry is the entity that grounds both the practice of politics and the aspirations of its communication systems. Yet the democratic project has failed to realize or actualize what proponents and opponents alike have thought to be an essential feature, namely the active and informed participation of a politically competent citizenry (Simonds, 1989, 182). A veritable mountain of information about public opinion and voter behaviour has been marshalled to demonstrate, quite dramatically, the divergence from the archetype of a politically competent citizenry by the actual, everyday practice of an apparently ill-informed, apathetic public who are, for the most part,

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disinclined to take part in politics beyond the most minimal and perfunctory levels of involvement and exertion (***Ibid.***). Thus, at the heart of Habermasian discussions of relationship between the media and democracy lies what has been called the "problem of the public". The substance of this "predicament" depends upon the perspective that one adopts. "The problem of the public" is either that citizens are incapable of participating in the informed and engaged manner assumed by democratic theory or that the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion are not engaging and involving the citizenry to the extent that they should. Although their general orientation on the prospects of democracy differ, both of these viewpoints stress the need for discussion and deliberation that is rational, contained, and oriented to a shared problem. In either instance the emphasis upon rational deliberation within the process of democratic decision-making is utilized so as to advance a particular ideological and normative claims. Elitist or anti-democratic thinkers have used the standards of expertise, moderation, and communal orientation as a way to exclude average citizens from political decision-making, while modern democrats seem to adopt these standards as guides for what democratic politics should be like (Sanders, 1997, 370). Notwithstanding their fundamental dissimilarity in outlook, both share - at least as a starting point - an underlying sense of discomfort and nervousness about democracy as a regime form, its cultural style, its prospective practical consequences, and its ethical pretensions (Dunn, 1996, 512). This sense of unease is especially pronounced in regards to the prospect and potential of untutored and unrestricted mass involvement in the exercise of sovereignty, be it in a limited or a much more expanded and direct form.

Endnotes

1. While Structural Transformation was not translated into English until nearly twenty-seven years after its original publication, it had, during this time, been translated into several other languages. Until the appearance of the 1989 translation,

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the arguments found in Structural Transformation were only available in English, in considerably truncated form, through a synoptic article (cf. Habermas, 1974). Not surprisingly, before 1989 only a handful studies in the English-speaking academic world had paid any attention to this particular work (see Cohen, 1979; Keane, 1984 & 1982). Curiously, since 1989, a prevailing tendency has been to treat it as a "preliminary" and subordinate undertaking in light of Habermas' post-1970 "real work" on communicative action and discourse ethics (Calhoun, 1992, ix - x: Hohendahl, 1992, 100). As Hohendahl notes, one consequence of such a perspective is to distance Habermas from his beginnings and de-emphasize his roots in the Frankfurt School (***Op. Cit.***).

2. In the 1992 essay entitled "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" (included in the collection Habermas and the Public Sphere edited by Craig Calhoun), Habermas noted that while, over time, he has distanced himself from Abendroth's "Hegelian-Marxist" style of thought this does nothing to diminish his intellectual and personal debt to Abendroth.

3. For a discussion of the critical reception of Structural Transformation in the German context see Hohendahl, 1982 especially chapter 7 - "Critical Theory, Public Sphere, and Culture: Jurgen Habermas and His Critics".

4. See especially "An Answer to the Question 'What is Enlightenment?'"; "On the Common Saying 'This May be True in Theory But it Does Not Apply in Practice'"; and "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" in Hans Reiss, Ed. and H. B. Nisbet, trans., Kant's Political Writings. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991- revised edition).

5. Habermas notes that this vision has had a peculiarly "normative" power and that as an "ideological template" it has preserved continuity over the centuries - on the level of intellectual history (Habermas, 1989a, 4).

6. Habermas goes on to argue that "the issues discussed became "general" not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate. Wherever the public established itself institutionally as a stable group of discussants, it did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name, perhaps even as its educator - the new form of bourgeois representation (Habermas, 1989a, 37: *emphasis* in original)." Yet, as discussed further on, Habermas undercuts this apparent avowal of representation as a political principle in his understanding of the manner in which the public sphere should function.

7. Dahlgren (1991, 4) notes that at this point in Habermas's narrative Anglo-American readers should begin to recognize a more familiar intellectual landscape.

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In the sections dealing with the "refeudalized" public sphere, Habermas depiction draws heavily from works such as Whyte's The Organization Man, Riesman's The Lonely Crowd, and C. W. Mills's The Power Elite.

8. A useful collection of the critical literature is to be found in Habermas and the Public Sphere (1992), edited by Craig Calhoun. This group of essays originated in a conference held in September 1989 to mark the publication of the English translation of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.

9. For example, in sharp contrast to the pious view of the philosophic movement that appears in the textbooks Darnton's research provides a bracing corrective to such tendencies. Darnton illustrates what was understood by the notion of "philosophical" by those who made it their business to know what Frenchmen wanted to read by quoting the following set of instructions from a bookseller in Poitiers to his supplier in Switzerland: "Here is a short list of philosophical books that I want. Please send the invoice in advance: Venus in the Cloister or the Nun in a Nightgown, Christianity Unveiled, Memoirs of Mme la marquise de Pompadour, Inquiry on the Origin of Oriental Despotism, The System of Nature, Theresa the Philosopher, Margot the Campfollower (Darnton, 1982, 1 - 2)."

10. In his review article dealing with the collection of essays Habermas and the Public Sphere, John Thompson notes that Habermas's arguments concerning the transformation of the Public sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not addressed in any detail by any of the contributing writers (Thompson, 1993, 182). Although Habermas's depiction of the collapse of a public of debating citizens into a fragmented world of consumers has been criticized as being overwrought and exaggerated, it is an interpretation of current circumstances that, allowing for varying degrees of emphasis and shading, still permeates and appears throughout the literature on the media and its relationship with democracy (for example see Alger, 1996; Agger, 1991; Anderson et al., 1994; Aufderheide, 1991; Berry et al., 1995; Carey, 1995; Collins & Skover, 1996; Dahlgren, 1987; Gamson et al., 1992; Herbeck, 1999; Lasch, 1997; Whillock, 1999).

11. As Geoff Eley points out, by subsuming all possibilities into his "*liberal* model of the bourgeois public sphere" Habermas ignores alternative sources of the emancipatory impulse in popular radical traditions studied by Edward Thompson (The Making of the English Working Class) and Christopher Hill (The World Turned Upside Down) (Eley, 1992, 306).

12. "'Public opinion' takes on a different meaning depending on whether it is brought into play as a critical authority in connection with the normative mandate that the exercise of political and social power be subject to publicity or as the object to be molded in connection with a staged display of, and manipulative propagation

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of, publicity in the service of persons and institutions, consumer goods and programs (Habermas, 1989a, 236)."

13. As Taylor succinctly notes, "Public is what matters to the whole society, or belongs to this whole society, or pertains to the instruments, or institutions or loci by which the society comes together as a body and acts (Taylor, 1990, 108)."

14. In The Power Elite - in a section both paraphrased and directly quoted by Habermas - Mills makes the following contrast between a community of publics and a mass society. He defines people as belonging to a *public* to the degree that "(1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against - if necessary - the prevailing system of authority. And (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is thus more or less autonomous in its operations (Mills, 1956, 303 - 304)." Conversely, Mills sees people belonging to a *mass* society to the extent that "(1) far fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community of publics becomes an abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media. (2) The communications that prevail are so organized that it is difficult or impossible for the individual to answer back immediately or with any effect. (3) The realization of opinion in action is controlled by authorities who organize and control the channels of such action. (4) The mass has no autonomy from institutions; on the contrary, agents of authorized institutions penetrate this mass, reducing any autonomy it may have in the formation of opinion by discussion (***Op. Cit.***, 304)."

15. Wollstonecroft also announces in her introduction that she will pursue a plan in which she: "shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style, I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words! and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slided from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversations (Wollstonecroft, 1985, 82)."

16. Gouldner sees this as being one of the ways in which "printing strengthened rational discourse both by its effect upon responses to arguments and, also, by its effects upon those offering the argument. The printed exposition of writing requires an author to finalize his argument. It disposes him to think of himself as having to prepare the 'final draft' that will be printed and which, once printed, cannot easily be

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changed or improved, and which may be stored and read long after publication (Gouldner, 1976, 41)." It not so much that print-as-technology exerts such a causative force upon human affairs (which is, it should be noted, the argument that Gouldner is making) but that understandings of the purposes, uses and meaning of print came to be viewed in an entirely different and altogether transformed manner (Warner, 1993).

17. For a discussion of this issue and its related implications and ramifications see Meyrowitz, 1985, especially chapter 7.

18. This point is considered in some detail in Meyrowitz, 1985; Scannell, 1989; and Thompson, 1995.

19. This line of thought was inspired by arguments advanced by Habermas in chapter 8 of Between Facts and Norms (1996) and Patricia Mann in her article "Unifying Discourse: City College As a Post-Modern Public Sphere" (1990).

20. In a note to this sentence, Mansbridge defines what she means by "interest" in this context in a particularly instructive manner: "I define 'interest' here as an enlightened preference, the preference one would have if one had perfect information, including inner knowledge of the person one would become with each choice and the experience of discussing the choices with others in a non-oppressive setting (Mansbridge, 1993, 97, n.5 - quotes in original)."

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Chapter Six:

The Problem of the Public

> *This is Publick Spirit; which contains in it every laudable Passion, and takes in Parents, Kindred, Friends, Neighbours, and every Thing dear to Mankind; it is the highest Virtue, and contains in almost all others; Steadfastness to good Purposes, Fidelity to one's Truth, Resolution in Difficulties, Defiance of Danger, Contempt of Death, and impartial Benevolence to all Mankind. It is a Passion to promote Universal Good, with personal Pain, Loss, and, Peril: It is one Man's care for many, and the Concern of every Man for All.*
>
> John Trenchard & Thomas Gordon, "Of publick Spirit"

While observers have examined many aspects of the *publicness* of the public sphere or realm, the core entity, the public itself, has been left in the shadows and ofttimes excluded from direct consideration. This shadow existence does not necessarily preclude the presence of the *public* from debates and discussions of the theoretical, practical and normative dimensions of the democratic project. In fact, it is often the case that discussions begin with a rumination on how the public and the public realm have been eviscerated and enfeebled in and by the practice of contemporary politics (see Calhoun, 1988; Hanson & Marcus, 1993; Hart, 1994; Herbeck, 1999; Whillock, 1999). Within such a diagnosis, an assumption about what the *public* or *public opinion* should be as compared to what they presently are acts as a critical premise or starting point in Habermasian ruminations about the relationship between the media and democracy. However, these premises about what the public should be are never directly articulated or spelled out in any amount of detail: the character of the ideal public is advanced through a combination of suggestion and implied contrast with current circumstances. Instead, faced with the fact and prospect of minimally participatory democratic systems, various analysts have suggested an assortment of measures to revitalize popular political participation.

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In the instance of the Habermasian literature, observers deem the main business at hand to be the discussion and assessment of the methods and measures by which the media might enable ordinary citizens to participate in the political system as well as assist them in reaching responsible and informed judgements.

At the best of times, popular sovereignty has never been an easy faith to maintain. The expression of either confidence in or good will towards the judgement of the people has been made even more difficult by evidence of the occasionally irrational and contradictory views espoused by the public at any given moment. In such circumstances, criticisms that the "*voice*" of the people is either too crude to merit consideration or ultimately undiscoverable have resulted in a number of slogans about public opinion that are heavy on idealism but light in analytical sophistication. Regardless of when and how such sentiments have been expressed, they resonate with a persistent dilemma that resides at the heart of discussions of the media and democracy: the gap between prescriptions of how the media *ought* to be providing rational, critical information and debate versus descriptions of the kind of sensationalistic, shallow content that the media actually *is* providing. The attempt to bridge this gap has served as the central project and enterprise shaping, explicitly or implicitly, the Habermasian examination of the relationship between the media and democracy. In this instance, the conception of the media's role as an instrument of deliberation in the dissemination of information and expert commentary is, in part, a way of addressing long-standing fears about the capacity and competence of the public: the role of the media is to tame and guide the opinions of the masses away from a perceived potential and tendency for irrationality, insularity and fallaciousness. However, while arguments for such an exacting and enhanced calibre of citizen involvement and capacity echo long-lived anxieties about the fact and prospect of mass participation in the process of authoritative decision-making, they do not reflect the institutional and procedural requirements of democracy. In this instance, the real dilemma is not that, for whatever reason, the public fails to live up

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to the expectations invested in it but that these selfsame expectations and aspirations of a "politically competent citizenry" are utilized without any kind of examination or analysis in regard to the actual needs of the process and institutions of democracy.

The dominant concern in the Habermasian literature is that the media operate in such a fashion as to sustain a space where a well-informed, active citizenry can engage in a rational-critical dialogue with established power. But the important question of ***why*** the media should conduct public life in a manner that encourages an on-going conversation about common affairs remains unasked and unexamined. The following chapter will illuminate the extent to which the Habermasian prescriptions for the role of the media stem from an ongoing apprehension about both the political competence of the public and the consequent impact of their involvement in the political process. This anxiety over the democratic sufficiency of the public only serves to distort the understanding of what healthy democratic citizenship should entail as well as the corresponding function and role of the media in contemporary circumstances. The ignorance or intelligence of the public in regards to its political participation and competency is a conceptual cul-de-sac that fails to clarify or shed any light upon the role of the public in a democracy. In light of the division of labour brought about by the institutions of representative government why does the public need to be of such an active and participatory variety? A distorted image of the necessary requirements for effective democratic citizenship has led to an equally misdirected conception of the proper role and functioning of the media. A more basic and pertinent question needs to be asked about the public in its relationship with both democracy and the media: does the democratic theory most relevant to the politics and institutions of representative government require the kind of rational/deliberative citizenry so often attributed to it? Through an examination of that part of the so-called "classical" democratic theory pertinent to the institutions and practice of representative government, this chapter will demonstrate that such expectations about the requirements of citizenship are entirely unwarranted and

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ultimately unnecessary(1). Instead, this chapter will show that a more apposite and productive focus centres around the kind of role that the institutions and processes of representative government require and create for the citizenry. An understanding of the kind of role that the institutional structure expects from its citizenry will, in turn, lead to a clearer conception of the type of role that media ***can*** and ***should*** play. The inferred conception of the media as an agent of *publicity* within the institutional structure of representative democracy will be examined and explored in the following chapter.

A primary Habermasian expectation about the media's function is that they will play a key role in achieving and sustaining the dialogue of democracy by their facilitation of "significant amounts of real exchanges of information, ideas, and opinions among political figures, journalists, and the public (Alger, 1996, 428)." A central component of this anticipated democratic capacity of the media is understood to be the provision or ***publication*** of information in that they are the major mechanism by which the citizenry are apprised about local, national and international issues, the activities of their political representatives and the day-to-day operation of the various levels of government under which they exist. Few advocates of democracy would argue or have argued that the public or public opinion is always right in each and every instance. But, adventurous and cautious proponents of democracy alike assume that a properly instructed and informed public is more than capable of discharging the duties of self-rule. Indeed, the language used in the justification and depiction of democracy assumes that citizens are equal to the task of ruling themselves - be it through their active participation in government or their delegation of these tasks to representatives; without this presumption the idea of self-governance does not make sense (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 3). Advocates of democracy have stressed repeatedly the importance of the basic decency, sound judgement, and good sense of the "common people" on whose shoulders the successful practice of popular government depends (Simonds, 1989, 183). Bryce's

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depiction of the "average" individual nicely captures the underlying assumptions at work in "classical" democratic theory:

> He is taken to be the man of broad common sense, mixing on equal terms with his neighbours, forming a fair unprejudiced judgement on every question, not viewy or pedantic like the man of learning, nor arrogant, like the man of wealth, but seeing things in a practical, businesslike, and withal kindly, spirit, pursuing happiness in his own way, and willing that every one else should do so. Such average men make the bulk of people, and are pretty sure to go right, because the publicity secured to the expression of opinion by speech and in print will supply them with ample material for judging what is best for all (Bryce, 1921, 149).

Supporters of democracy with robust understandings of citizenship have thought that the public as a collective body is capable of holding more "informed" and sensible opinions if it is exposed to truthful, helpful and unbiased information (See Abramson et al., 1988; Barber, 1984; Dewey, 1927; Fishkin, 1995 & 1991; Hart, 1994; Page & Shapiro, 1992). Moreover, the resulting reflection and deliberation on the part of the collective public is thought to be assisted immeasurably when this information is placed in an appropriate context. In this regard, Henry Reeve depicted the role of the media as being akin to the closing arguments made by attorneys in the court system: "They (the media) arrange, collate, condense, and expound for the benefit of the listening jury, calling attention to what might have been overlooked, pointing out what is important and what is irrelevant, clearing up what is obscure, explaining what is technical, and placing before the audience the matter for consideration in a prepared form and in the clearest and most instructive light (Reeve, 1855, 478 - 479)." The media place information before the public as well as situate this information in terms of its importance and overall relevance: ideally, the media serve as a forum where various viewpoints and interpretations of this information can be placed before the public for consideration.

Bryce's view of the political capacity and capability of the public was not

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always the principal one expressed or endorsed by political observers. Like the image of democratic politics as the "gathering together" of all the citizenry in one place to discuss and decide matters of public interest, uneasiness about the involvement of the public in political decision-making can trace its lineage back to ancient Greece. For example, Plato, via the figure of Socrates, challenged the view that Athenians acted reasonably in accepting the advice of the common people on political matters. He likened this situation to one in which an individual

> learns by heart the angers and desires of a great, strong beast he is rearing, how it should be approached and how taken hold of, when - and as a result of what - it becomes most difficult or most gentle, and particularly, under what conditions it is accustomed to utter its several sounds, and, in turn, what sorts of sounds uttered by another make it tame and angry. When he has learned all this from associating and spending time with the beast, he calls it wisdom and, organizing it as an art, turns to teaching. Knowing nothing in truth about which of these convictions and desires is noble, or base, or good, or evil, or just, or unjust, he applies all these names following the great animal's opinions - calling what delights it good and what vexes it bad (Plato, 1968, 172 - 173: 493AB)(2).

For the longest period of time, the image of the public as an unreflective and volatile crowd tended to predominate in discussions of democracy and theories of political practice (See Gunn, 1983, 260 - 315). At the same time, judgements about the disposition of public opinion tended to be equally negative. Both were deemed altogether too vulgar and incapable of the restraint and rationality required when considering and deliberating about important political matters. Inclusion of the people's voice in the process of decision-making was believed to be a guaranteed recipe for the subversion of a social order's stability. This type of estimation of both the public and public opinion as volatile and unreliable persevered through the literature as the perennial antithetical position to more positive valuations of either entity as a political agent.

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It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that "opinion" underwent the radical conceptual transformation in which the concept, as we have come to know it, emerged(3). During this period, conceptions of "public opinion" underwent changes that plainly parallelled contemporaneous transformations in political institutions and ideas (Peters, 1995, 5). Foremost amongst these was the understanding of its primary character as a conceptual category. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the principal characteristics of "public opinion" were thought to be those of flux, subjectivity, and uncertainty; by the mid-eighteenth century its central characteristics were believed to be those of universality, objectivity, and rationality (Baker, 1990, 168). Baker notes that within the space of a generation, "the flickering lamp of 'opinion'" had been transformed into "the unremitting light of 'public opinion', the light of the universal tribunal before which citizens and governments alike must now appear (***Ibid.***)." Yet, for a number of reasons this transformation remained an incomplete and unsuccessful one. Elements of the earlier, negative perception endured in spite of the conceptual transformation. Indeed, such impressions received a boost, if not outright validation, from the picture of public opinion revealed by the spate of research into voter behaviour and beliefs conducted over the past fifty years. Social scientists have shown that citizens' knowledge of politics is slim, their tolerance for others is low, and their position on various issues is incoherent if not non-existent (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 2: see also Converse, 1975 as well as Kinder & Herzog, 1993). Moreover, a substantial body of evidence has also accumulated that points to declining rates of participation in the process of self-governance by large numbers of citizens in modern democracies. During the past ten years in the United States, for instance, close to half of all eligible voters have failed to vote in major elections - particularly in mid-term elections for the House of Representatives.

Beyond casting serious doubt upon the picture painted by Bryce, the reading of this accumulated evidence has generated two different reactions among political

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observers. On the one hand, some have responded to the discontinuity between theory and practice by undertaking a redefinition of what constitutes the proper standards and norms of citizen participation(4). For such a viewpoint, sometimes referred to as theoretical realism, evidence of the lack of knowledge and motivation on the part of the citizenry only serves to underscore the extent to which the task that had been previously assigned to the citizen was an impossible, if not wholly unrealistic one. In the realist perspective the majority of the public is inherently incapable of competently discharging the exercise of sovereignty required of them by "classical" democratic theory. Furthermore, the generally unpredictable nature of the masses, in terms of their self-control and reasoning, mandates that the involvement of the public be contained so as not to prevent or hinder trained experts and professionals - the political "elite" - from identifying and pursuing the public's true, overall interest. Above all else, the realist position is concerned that the overall ability and efficiency of the institutions of democracy to make and implement decisions not be compromised. Instead, expectations about what democracy is supposed to be and what role public opinion can conceivably play must be curtailed: the assumptions of democratic theory need to be reconciled with reality (Schudson, 1995, 206). Accordingly, the public is better conceived as a reserve force to be mobilized by competing elites rather than as an autonomous and separate dispenser of laws, policies and morals. This, for Walter Lippmann, is all that democracy can be: "We must abandon the notion that the people govern. Instead we must adopt the theory that, by their occasional mobilizations as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally (Lippmann, 1925, 61- 62)." In place of the "will" of the people, stability and rationality in political decision-making is to be ensured through the maintenance of a professionally competent bureaucracy and the presence of democratically accountable, competing political elites. Whatever their pitfalls, only trained professionals are seen to provide the hope and possibility that reason would control and guide political life (Aronowitz, 1993,

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80). Such revisionism places greater, but by no means unlimited, confidence in the wisdom of elected representatives, who seem more committed to the democratic creed by virtue of their training and the milieu within which they are situated (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 2).

On the other hand, an entirely diametric direction is taken by those who seek to identify and surmount the conditions obstructing the attainment of democratic norms. For this viewpoint, empirical evidence of the poor rate of participation, vacillation and inconsistency in public opinion are not conclusive proof of innate incompetence on the part of the masses(5). Rather, they are a manifestation of the failure of current forms of democratic practice to achieve meaningful forms of public participation. The public's divergence from the assumptions of democratic theory only underscores the need for renewed attempts to engage and inform the citizenry: "The essential need ... is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is the problem of the public (Dewey, 1927, 208: *emphasis* in original)." Research data about public opinion and voter behaviour does not so much as undermine the assumptions of democratic theory as it points to the lack of institutions and means by which the public can come into being as a political entity. Accordingly, the focus for this outlook is upon the ways and institutions by which the public can become fully formed and informed: the principal ambition is to align the practices, standards and ideals of democratic theory rather than redefine them. Participatory democrats argue that the "undemocratic proclivities" depicted in the unflattering portrait provided by the empirical evidence are to be expected from political systems that fail to provide their citizenry with meaningful opportunities for political participation (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 4). It is their belief that the institutions of government should be altered so as to increase and intensify the amount and degree of citizen participation in the political process. By doing this the end result would be the encouragement and development of the democratic character and civic responsibility of the public: the masses can acquire the necessary

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competence and awareness of their common interest through greater involvement in public affairs and the process of collective deliberation.

In light of the data supplied by empirical research, conceptualizations of what is or what should be meant by democracy have tended to fall broadly into either one of these camps. The prime area of contention and dispute between these two positions can be characterized as centring on the overall feasibility and desirability of their respective plans to involve the public, be it in an expanded or more limited fashion, in the process of collective decision-making. On the one hand, the realist perspective maintains that questions about individual citizens' political capacities are matters of fact. On the other hand, proponents of participatory democracy believe that there are no inherently disabling traits that make it impossible or undesirable for ordinary citizens to play a significant role in governing themselves (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 10). However, while they differ in terms of their overall assessment of the potential of the public, both realist and participatory democrat alike treat the public as an *object* that is to be disciplined or encouraged, restrained or educated. Neither perspective views the public as the *subject* or *author* of political action or initiative: instead, the public is portrayed as an object whose actions stem from appetites and desires that political institutions can either cultivate, harness, keep in check or dispense with entirely - depending upon the viewpoint that is being presented. As such, this leaves an aura of uncertainty about the public as both a theoretical concept and as a political entity. The nature of this ambivalence is further complicated by an underlying tension between the rhetorical and descriptive elements contained within this conception. That is, as a concept, the **public** exists as both a sociological referent and a more abstract theoretical entity: while both overlap in their meaning and point of reference, the strain between the prescriptive and descriptive elements allows the concept of *public* to be a rhetorically malleable term at the expense of its explanatory purchase.

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Although positioned at the centre of the political process, as an agent and a concept the public is, in effect, an empty vessel whose content is determined by the perspective of the observer as well as the influence of external forces and institutions. Yet, the legitimacy and aspirations of these extrinsic entities are derived from, in ideal terms at least, the fiduciary relationship that they have with the public: they do not function so as to further their own interest but rather any activity that they undertake is geared towards realizing benefits for the populous as a whole - the greater *common* good. Furthermore, both perspectives take the picture painted by the empirical evidence as representing the fundamental, innate nature of this object. "Pure", unregulated and undirected public opinion is regarded by both orientations as being a random and ever-changing mixture of wisdom, folly, intelligence and foolishness. As a consequence, both view the degree to which the public can become a public of decision makers, in whatever capacity, as being dependent upon their being made more rational, deliberate, foresighted and oriented towards common, not selfish, interests. Each perspective treats citizenship as something requiring, if not necessitating, the cultivation of a particular set of intellectual and deliberative skills and capacities within an individual. One side sees such training as being within the capability of only a select set of individuals, while the other believes that such training can be designed and instituted so as to benefit the public in its entirety.

While these conceptions have diverged in the theoretical extrapolations and interpretations they derive from the empirical evidence, there is nevertheless a surprising degree of resonance between their respective positions. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, in spite of their differing emphasis and orientation, both the realist and participatory democrat perspectives share an underlying suspicion about the "natural" competence of the public in regards to political activity. Another area in which this is particularly true is their conceptualization of the role that the media should play in a democratic system. While discussions of the relationship between the media and democracy cannot be easily divided into realist and participatory

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camps, the positions outlined in the early twentieth century by Walter Lippmann and John Dewey personify and capture the division and confluence of these competing outlooks: their respective positions, especially the orientation taken by Dewey, have been echoed throughout the literature in the intervening time. In Public Opinion (1922) and The Phantom Public (1925), Lippmann argued that the role of public opinion, due to its inherent limitations, be confined to strictly procedural questions while more substantive decisions be left to an administrative and intellectual elite of experts and professionals. Contrary to the portrayal of public opinion as an active, sovereign force, Lippmann saw it more as a "phantom" that only occasionally intervened in public affairs. In his opinion this was as it should be, since the public's attention to and interest in politics was shallow and fleeting: "They cannot ... construe intent, or appraise the exact circumstances, enter intimately into the minds of the actors or into the details of the argument. They can watch only for coarse signs indicating where their sympathies ought to turn (Lippmann, 1925, 64)." Far from directing public affairs, the public merely aligned themselves with one leader or another based upon a superficial, quickly-made snapshot judgement of their respective positions and arguments. To believe that the ordinary citizen was capable of more than this was simply unreasonable, since the individual person "does not have opinions on all public affairs. He does not know how to direct public affairs. He does not know what is happening, why it is happening, what ought to happen. I cannot imagine how he could know, and there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs (***Op. Cit.***, 39)."

The Public and its Problems (1927) was Dewey's response to Lippmann's arguments about the nature and role of the public in both political life and democracy. While Dewey admired much of Lippmann's analysis, he rejected the suggestion made by Lippmann in both Public Opinion and The Phantom Public that

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the time had come to discard the ideology of popular democracy for the more "realistic" perspective of democratic elitism (Aronowitz, 1993, 80). Like Lippmann, Dewey paints a picture of a political system in which the public seems to be "lost" or, at least, "bewildered": "If a public exists, it is surely as uncertain about its own whereabouts as philosophers since Hume have been about the residence and make-up of the self (Dewey, 1927, 117)." Dewey accepts the picture painted of the public by Lippmann, but believes that the evidence of the poor political performance of the public was not a conclusive sign of the innate incompetence of the masses but of a failure to achieve meaningful forms of public participation (Peters, 1989, 212). The problem, as he sees it, is that we have inherited "local town-meeting practices and ideas" while living and acting within the confines of a continental nation state: "The machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of indirect consequences, have formed such immense and consolidated unions in our action, or an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself (Dewey, 1927, 126)." In Dewey's view, public opinion will only act as sovereign force if there is an improvement in the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion (***Op. Cit.***, 208). Through more participatory institutions and practices of communication democracy's dislocated and seemingly disabled public life would be overcome: "There is no limit to the liberal expansion and confirmation of limited personal intellectual endowment which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence when that circulates by word of mouth from one to another in the communications of the local community. That and only that gives reality to public opinion (***Op. Cit.***, 219)."

Both Dewey and Lippmann have a similar diagnosis: the situation within contemporary society has become increasingly complicated as a result of industrialization, the great expansion of scale and speed, and the sense that the ordinary individual was sapped of the potency to change or understand events (Peters,

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1989, 209). Although their subsequent prescriptions diverge, both accord a significant, if not equivalent, role to the media. While their respective visions of democracy are quite opposite from one another, Lippmann and Dewey share a common vision of the media as agents of transformation by means of their ability to *publicise* or make things public and accessible to all. Through this power of *publicity* both see and conceive of the media as a means of altering the current condition of the public and public opinion. By performing this function in what each deems a suitable and appropriate manner, the media act as a source/instrument of guidance for the public. While both Lippmann and Dewey understand this instrument to have thoroughly different objectives, the fundamental nature of the meta-task they set for the media, in spite of these differences, is essentially the same. Chiefly, the media serve as the agents by which a dislocated and seemingly disabled public is "guided" into what they deem as its appropriate role within their respective vision of a properly functioning democratic political system.

Even in a system of government with a reduced role for the individual citizen, Lippmann still sees the media as having an important function and role. For Lippmann, the media operate as "a servant and guardian of institutions" in that "it is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then and another out of darkness into vision (Lippmann, 1922, 364)." But since people cannot govern society by "episodes, incidents, and eruptions", the media are no substitute for the various professional and administrative institutions within government. Within Lippmann's vision of democratic government the process of decision-making would be entirely in the hands of an elite group of trained experts and officials. These institutions would be responsible for collecting information, analysing it, and deciding what should be done so as to further the public interest. In such an institutional structure, Lippmann saw the media operating as representatives of the public by correctly informing public opinion (Carey, 1989a, 78). That is, the media would *popularize* and *publicize* the information and positions

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circulating within the discussions of the administrative and political elite. Therefore, the media work less as an agent of direct democracy and more as a source of "representation" in terms of their ability to make things public and commonly accessible(6). Moreover, the material that the media would be presenting to the public would be more beneficial to the public since it would be the product of a more rigorous and scientifically focussed methodology and intent. In this way, expert opinions and information on public affairs would be freely circulated within the public realm for all to consult as they saw fit. Thus, the role of the media is part of the *education* of the public and public opinion: an education, as Lippmann repeatedly emphasizes, that is very distinct from that required for public office since "citizenship involves a radically different relation to affairs, requires different intellectual habits, and different methods of action (Lippmann, 1925, 151)." With the assistance of the media, public opinion, which Lippmann characterizes as being "partisan, spasmodic, simple-minded and external" by nature, would gain a much needed sense of direction and rationality through its exposure to more accurate information and the correctly informed judgement of experts.

Dewey also views the media as instruments by which both the public and public opinion will be guided towards a much more effective and productive form of involvement. However, unlike Lippmann, Dewey believes that this involvement should be of a deeper, richer and more participatory nature. In this regard, Dewey sees the failure of the media as not lying in the kind of information it delivers but in the way in which it delivers this information(7). Namely, the media, by seeing its role as being one of informing the public, have abandoned their role as instruments for carrying on the conversation of a shared common culture (Carey, 1989a, 82). Dewey holds that the generation of democratic communities can only be secured to the degree that local community life becomes a reality. As he puts it, the "expansion and reenforcement of personal understanding and judgement by the cumulative and transmitted intellectual wealth of the community which may render nugatory the

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indictment of democracy drawn on the basis of the ignorance, bias and levity of the masses, can be fulfilled only in the relations of personal intercourse in the local community (Dewey, 1927, 218)." In Dewey's mind it is not enough that the media simply put information before the public. Such a dissemination of material is akin to informing the public in a partial and incomplete fashion. Public opinion, in his view, is given its reality through an ongoing conversation at all levels within the public sphere. The role of the media, thereby, becomes one of activating and cultivating the kind of inquiry and discussion that democracy requires: as he notes "the highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and a subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it (***Op. Cit.***, 184)." As was the case with Lippmann, Dewey sees the proper role of the media as that of being instruments by which public opinion would gain a much needed sense of direction and rationality through its cultivation and immersion within a community-building and particpatory sphere of communication.

Lippmann and Dewey's reactions are representative of the general trend within the Habermasian literature in terms of their envisionment of the role to be played by the media. The problem of the public is to be resolved through an improvement in individual's sources of knowledge: if the information and debate that individuals receive is rational and comprehensive enough, so too, the argument goes, will the corresponding judgement and abilities which they bring to the practice of politics. Evidence of the public's apparent political incapacity is interpreted as being a reflection of the deficiency of the media's current performance rather than of any inherent and ingrained incompetence on the part of the public. To wit, much of Habermas's criticism is directed at the way in which the media act as mechanism by which the *public sphere* is re-feudalized and emptied of its rational-critical dimension (see Habermas, 1989a especially chapters V & VI). Habermas and those inspired by his model propose a number of means by which to make political communication

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both compelling to citizens and adequate to the problems facing the polity: ridding the profession of bad practices, promoting social responsibility and improving ethical sensitivity (Rosen, 1991, 269). The overriding principle at work in such proposals is that the media are to function as instruments by which the public is integrated into a particular vision of a *rational-critical*, deliberative political process. At heart, it is a Jeffersonian vision in which the people function as the ultimate source and repository of the "ultimate powers of the society". If it is the case that the public is believed to be not enlightened enough to exercise "their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education (Jefferson, 1905a, 163)." In this regard, the function of the media is envisioned as converging toward a single, crucial end - the development of a rational citizenry capable of genuinely public thinking and political judgement.

Whether its task is that of reviving public life or advancing a program of civic enhancement or education, the media are frequently positioned as a mechanism of transformation in the Habermasian literature (for examples of this tendency see: Anderson et al., 1994; Curran, 1996; Dahlgren, 1995; Grossman, 1995; Hackett & Zhao, 1998 Hart, 1994; Rosen, 1996 & 1991). However, making the realisation and facilitation of the ideal of a rational and critical citizenry the central task of the media has one frequently unnoticed, but nevertheless consequential, by-product. To the degree that the task of the media is one of improving the political competence of the public, conceptions of the role of the media are thereby directly shaped by an ongoing anxiety over the political capacity and capability of the public rather than by an understanding of the specific function and role of the public-as-citizens. The resulting understanding of the function of the media is not guided by a positive conception of the role of the citizen nor is it influenced by an understanding of the requirements and demands of the actual institutions and procedures of the political system. Instead, it is largely the product of an effort to neutralize and transcend a long-standing, negative impression of the competency of the citizenry-at-large. This

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results in a construction and understanding of the role and function of the individual citizen that is aimed more at answering the arguments of those sceptical about the premises of democracy than formulating the ways in which the media can assist the individual in their actual role and duty as a citizen. The media's priority becomes the improvement of the individual rather than the abetment of the citizen. In such an instance, the task of the media becomes a far more complicated and uncertain one. The media are not only charged with the provision of information and opinion but also with the instillation of a particular *rational* disposition and set of skills in the public.

At one level, Habermasian theories of and commentaries on the media can be read as attempts to accommodate and integrate mass participation in the political process. More than that, they are part of an enterprise to demonstrate as well as ensure that mass participation could acquire and embody characteristics that would subsequently disqualify and disprove the objections levelled against "mass democracy" by anti-democratic thinkers through the ages. Specifically, the belief that "the masses are bound to get out of control when they get together, that they are incapable of rational argument, and that they cannot see beyond their narrow selfish concerns (Sanders, 1997, 354)." However, as much as the ensuing effort strives to disprove the generally unflattering impression of the public and their political abilities, it implicitly accepts the negative characterization as something that needs to be overcome or transcended to some extent. The positioning of the media as an agent of "transformation" tacitly confirms the partial overlap and resonance between the democratic and anti-democratic view of the public: in that both see an untutored public as being theoretically and logistically problematic for a democratic system. Thus, underlying the most basic expectations of what the media should do is a paradoxical conception of the public. On the one hand, there is a consistent utilization of a more abstract notion of public, in the sense of openness, rationality and accessibility to all, that carries a highly favoured and thoroughly positive

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normative sense. Yet, *public*, as a term, also refers to a concrete sociological entity which carries a far more mixed and equivocal meaning and legacy. On account of this, even the most vociferous advocates of public opinion as a positive political force are extremely cautious, if not circumspect, about transferring any significant amount of political power into the hands of an unrestrained and untutored public. Consequently, the status of the public has remained an ambiguous and unresolved issue in discussions of the democratic project. If and when the public is focussed upon, it is usually as part of a proposal or plan to "improve" or "enrich" their participation within the political process. The underlying nature and conception of the entity driving such measures is left unaddressed and unexamined, even though it is this double-minded perception of the public that lies at the conceptual core of Habermasian discussions of the role of the media and its relationship with democratic procedures.

Although fluctuation over the potential and nature of the public is a persistent feature of so-called "classical" discussions of democracy, its presence in this literature seldom elicits any kind of commentary or examination. Nevertheless, this latent ambivalence about the public - as both a concept and as a political entity - plays a direct role in how the function and purpose of the media is understood and conceptualized. As well, it is an ambiguity that is positioned at the very heart of such theories, in terms of the hypothesized relationship that the media has with both the public and public opinion. That is, the media are placed as instruments which facilitate the emergence and sustained action of a rational-critical public in the political arena. It is a deployment that is necessary to sustain the normative underpinning and orientation of the theory of democracy being proposed. Underlying the most basic expectations about the composition and sustainment of a democratic public space was the belief that the central principle of authority at work within it was that of public opinion. In this instance, ***public opinion*** was not simply understood as the generalized social practice of a nation's custom and values but

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rather was seen as "the enlightened expression of active and open discussion of all political matters" and "the free exercise of the public voice regarding the daily conduct of affairs (Baker, 1990, 188)." Emerging in the mid-eighteenth century, this notion of public opinion as a political tribunal served as the device by which bourgeois society sought to limit and transform the power of the absolutist state: as a political space it was understood as an arena in which the use of power was justified and exercised through rational-critical contestation and deliberation (Habermas, 1989a). Both the new role of the public in political matters as well as the emergence of this enlightened public opinion were believed to have been facilitated by the increased dissemination of information and opinion through the printing press and the newspapers. Through their amassment and diffusion of ideas and information the periodical press were thought to play a key role in the emergence of this conceptualization of a new public space and body. As has been noted in previous chapters, both the printing press as well as the growth of literacy were recognized and praised as the means by which the new role of the public in political matters could be achieved and sustained. For instance, Chretien-Guillaume Lamoignon de Malesherbes declared that

> The art of printing has thus given writing the same publicity that the spoken word possessed in the midst of the assemblies of the nation during the first age. But it has taken many centuries for the discovery of this art to have its full effect upon men. It required that the entire nation gain the taste and habit of informing itself by reading. And it has required that enough men become skilled in the art of writing to lend their ministry to the entire public, taking the place of those gifted with natural eloquence who made themselves heard by our forefathers on the Champs de Mars or in the public judicial hearings (*as quoted in* Baker, 1990, 188).

With the assistance of the media, the *public* and *public opinion* emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth century political discourse as abstract categories which were utilized in a new kind of politics in order to secure and establish the legitimacy of claims that could no longer be made binding in either the terms or the institutional

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structure of an absolutist political order (Baker, 1990, 172). The *public* functioned as a seat of political power that was not exclusively located in the State or its representatives nor in the private sector arenas of the household and the business company (Carey, 1995, 382). With the location of power in the *public* and public discourse the overriding principle of authority was made more abstract than that which had previously existed under the system of aristocratic and regal hierarchy. The press were viewed as the primary medium of this political space. Through their agency, Jacques Peuchet argued in 1789, "an entire sect, an entire nation, the whole of Europe, is called to pronounce judgement upon a host of objects regarding which, previously, only despotism or the interest of particular individuals had the right to make themselves heard. From this gathering of ideas, from this concentration of enlightenment, a new power has formed that, in the hands of public opinion, governs the world and gives law to the civilized nations (*as quoted in* Baker, 1990, 195)."

But alongside this fostering of the space in which the abstract and all-encompassing sense of "public" and "public opinion" could operate, the media were also seen as grounding these notions in a definite concrete reality. The press stimulate the new role of the public through their facilitation of a process of discussion and deliberation amongst the citizenry of a nation state. Judgement is not pronounced exclusively in an abstract public realm, but it is also enunciated and conveyed through the functioning communication of various individuals in newspapers, coffeehouses, salons and other assorted public spaces located in the corporeal spatial-temporal setting of the nation state. This new **public** was not only seen as an abstract, theoretical phenomenon, but as a tangible, concrete occurrence within the confines of a particular political system. It was felt that only through a process of constant and ongoing communication that a population truly constituted itself as a public body; additionally, such a process permitted the development and flourishing of an enlightened public opinion. In the context of the nation state, this process of communication is facilitated by the intercession of the media as a forum

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accessible and potentially open to all the citizenry. As Tocqueville observed the press remedy the problems of political communication in nation states whose territory exceeds beyond the confines of the small *polis*: the *polis* which had long been considered the only possible configuration in which democracy could flourish (see Dahl & Tufte, 1973). The press were the vehicle that allowed the "voice" of the people to acquire a concrete, albeit a self-selecting and representative, form as well as permitting general access to the subjects of public deliberation. They were the instruments that defined the body politic through their creation of common linguistic and discursive denominators around which incipient nations could rally in spite of local and regional accents and dialects (Katz, 1998, 91). By providing a commonly accessible source of information and space for rational-critical debate on political matters to a dispersed citizenry, the media were positioned as key entities in the creation of a shared identity in the imagined political community that is the nation. Through their convocation as an audience (be it as spectator, listener or reader or some derivation thereof) individuals became citizens united in a shared public discourse about the future and identity of their respective country: the media were seen to be constitutive of the "democratic imaginary" that informed and influenced the arena of public discussion (Kaplan, 1997, 331, 333).

Through the convocation of individuals as an audience to a shared set of communications, the newly emergent conception of public space incorporated elements of both the reality of the public as a concrete entity and as a more fleeting abstract occurrence. In addition to its transformation of the spatial and temporal dimension of the conversation of individuals (and even of those who did not read the newspapers)(8), the newspaper press were perceived as facilitating the generation of a particular form of public space: a public sphere imbued with the habits and practices of rational-critical debate. However, "opinion" did not lose all of its negative connotations of irrationality and fickleness merely by the fact that it was made "public" (Baker, 1990, 189). Through the example and vehicle of the press,

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both the public and public opinion could and would adopt the trappings, if not eventually subscribe to, the substance of rational reflection and expression. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the press were viewed as the medium through which the exercise of power could come to wear a rational-critical face. Besides providing an open "space" in which all citizens could ideally, if not potentially, enter as equals, present their views and issues, and participate in the formation of a political consensus, the press also imbue public deliberation with a number of highly valued and desired attributes (Kaplan, 1997, 332). Chief amongst these was the propagation of a reasoned, critical discourse accessible to all citizens equally and detached from the specific, personal concerns, identity and interests of a particular speaker/writer (Warner, 1993, Nerone, 1993). As the central "space" of public political debate, it was believed that the press-as-a-medium influenced and imprinted the kind of interaction that occurred within its confines(9). In turn, the resultant impersonal, rational and universalistic discourse was held to define the content and essence of the public sphere. As such, the public sphere was taken to be critical and rational - critical in that nothing in public was to be taken for granted, everything was to be subject to argument and evidence, and rational in that the speaker was responsible for giving reasons for believing in any assertion, so that there was no intrinsic appeal to authority (Carey, 1995, 381). By the same sign, the instillation of such features into the ebb and flow of popular political debate were also a means of countering and allaying the traditional objections to and criticisms of public involvement and participation in the process of government.

The critical aspect in all this is that the media are ultimately justified and situated in political discourse in terms of a perceived ability to serve and bring into existence a distinctive social configuration and form of discourse within a sphere of independent, rational political influence (Carey, 1995, 382). The existence of the media, and the nature of their contents in regards to the politics, presumes the existence of a public, political, opinion external to the often small and enclosed

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milieu of the legislative process (Burns, 1977, 48). If it serves a definite purpose within the discourse, above all else, the public functions as the god-term of both the media and liberal society alike; it is the be-all and end-all, the term without which neither the media nor democracy makes any sense (Carey, 1995, 383). Regardless of the role attributed to the media, the significant factor is that this role is not an end in itself, but that it is justified in terms of its relationship with the public. Any political function or role that the media may have is one that is defined by a relationship that is to be established with the public. Whether the media are informing and educating the public, acting as its watchdog against the state, or serving as a vehicle of publicity the value of the media - and the essence of its function - is predicated on the existence of the public and not the reverse (***Op. Cit.***, 382). This is a decisive point. Both the rhetorical and more substantial theoretical claims advanced on behalf of the media are premised on the belief that the media can and should bring into existence an actual social arrangement, a form of discourse and a sphere of independent, rational, and political influence (***Ibid.***). Similarly, these claims also assume and believe that, through appropriate coaching and instruction, the public can be transformed into a politically competent body - however this may be defined and understood.

Discussion of the actual or potential political capacity of the public has centred around different readings and assessments of a so-called "classical" democratic theory in terms of the validity and feasibility of the expectations attached to the kind of role that the individual citizen should play or perform. For instance, the debate between participatory democrats and realists has focalized around this very issue (see Pateman, 1970; Plamenatz, 1973). The persistent vacillation about the potential and performance of the public is, to a certain extent, the result of the manner in which the ***public*** is conceived: throughout the literature, it functions as both a rhetorical/theoretical and sociological referent. A close examination of the category of the public reveals its simultaneous existence in the discourse, alluded to

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earlier, as both an *abstract*, theoretical entity and as a *concrete*, empirical one: the public is understood both as purely *spiritual* collectivity and as a human grouping situated in a specific spatial-temporal location (Tarde, 1969). Moreover, this bifurcation in what could be meant by the term *public* embodies and incorporates a delitescent assessment and valuation in regards to the potential and capabilities of the public alluded to by either denotation. For example, Gabriel Tarde bestows a particular normative meaning and value on each sense of *public* by means of a direct comparison. He describes the substitution of the older sense of *public* (which he refers to as "crowd") by the more abstract, *spiritual* public as being an advantageous one since such a transformation "is always accompanied by progress in tolerance, if not in skepticism (Tarde, 1969, 281)." Moreover, he notes that an individual can - and in fact does - belong simultaneously to several publics, "as to several corporations and sects"; whereas an individual can only be part of one crowd at a time (***Ibid.***). From this observation Tarde believes that it follows that crowds are "naturally" more intolerant, since individuals can be completely taken over and irresistibly drawn along by the force and influence of physical proximity with no effective counterbalance (***Ibid.***). Thus, the other more concretely rooted meaning of *public,* in the sense of what he refers to as a "crowd", is portrayed by Tarde as having "something animal about it": when normally liberal and tolerant individuals become swept up by the tide of its emotions and passions, they quite easily turn authoritarian and tyrannical (***Op. Cit.***, 281, 289). These "animal" inclinations are, in part, a result of the far greater influence that "physical agents" have upon the formation and development of crowds (***Op. Cit.***, 287). A dispersed *spiritual* public is not really affected to any degree by factors such as the season, the latitude or the physical presence and behaviour of other individuals. Whereas, the mutual contact between and contagion of sentiments among assembled individuals can, in Tarde's view, definitely affect the formation and behaviour of crowds. In every regard, the newer *spiritual* public was an improvement over the older *crowd.* Nonetheless, a longstanding tension exists between these two notions as a result of the tendency

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within both the rhetoric and theory of democracy to use them in a relatively indiscriminate and interchangeable fashion.

The fuzziness of the public as a concept in the literature is a function of its significance as a political ***invention*** rather than as a sociological referent. Above all else, the place of the public in democratic theory is that of being the central rhetorical figure, rather than a specifically social referent, in a politics based upon an appeal to rational consensus. As Michael Schudson has remarked: "The public has ever been fictional. It is the democratic fiction par excellence, carried by the imaginations of people in authority who want to get things done or by people without authority who believe a better world can yet be made, and sustained in good times and bad by republican institutions - elections, a free press, parties, the rule of law, and the arts of association. It is the fiction that brings self-government to life (Schudson, 1995, 32)." Starting in the Eighteenth century, the public emerged as a central rhetorical figure in a new kind of politics. Political observers designated the *public* as a new source of authority, the supreme tribunal to which all authority, monarchical as well as other, had to appeal for legitimacy and sanction (Baker, 1990, 168). However, the invocation of the *abstract* sense of the public sat uneasily alongside a longstanding apprehension about the reality and consequence of mass involvement in the process of authoritative decision-making. Each and every observer was equally aware that an "overexcited" public was easily capable of producing fanatical crowds and mobs who might run riot through the streets (Tarde, 1969, 281). On account of this underlying uneasiness, arguments advancing the notion of the public as a political tribunal tended to be hazy or silent on the issue of actual social composition or referent of said entity. No observer was particularly keen upon fixing the sociological referent of the concept in favour of one or another of the various competing groups in society (Baker, 1990, 186). Correspondingly, it was also the case that no observer was keen upon being seen as advocating the incorporation and utilization of the *public* as a political force within the institutional structure. More

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than anything else, this reflected an awareness of the extremely tenuous nature of the conceptual structure being advanced when it was asserted that contesting claims should be placed before the *public* for assessment and judgement.

Sovereignty of the people is a fiction that cannot survive too close an examination or too literal application. It requires that we believe not only in the existence of an unified entity called the *people*, but also in the capacity of this body to make decisions and to act apart from the elected representatives of particular localities (Morgan, 1988, 256). The idea that the entire citizenry, but for the inconvenience and impediments of assembling in large numbers, could act for themselves, was a necessary ingredient of the notion of popular sovereignty (***Op. Cit.***, 211). It gave a sense of authenticity to the transfer of decision-making powers to representatives in elections as well as helping to sustain the basis of their authority (***Ibid.***). The ascription of sovereignty to the people required the envisionment of the people as a single body, capable of thinking, of acting, of making decisions and carrying them out, something quite apart from government, superior to government, and able to alter or remove a government at will, a collective entity more powerful than any individual or set of individuals within it that it may select to govern it (***Op. Cit.***, 154). While by no means a simple or straightforward conception, as a political or ideological assemblage, such an abstraction allowed writers to skirt the long-lived prejudice against the *sociological* or concrete public as a political entity. To the degree that the public is utilized as a political or ideological construct, it implies the presence of a new system of authority in which both government and opponents function. In the abstract understanding, the public is more than a particular group of people, it is a location, a sphere of political power that could mediate the ever-present tension between the state and civil society (Carey, 1995, 382). As such, the abstract notion of a new arena of legitimacy transformed the nature of political culture. The significance of the ***public***, as a concept, lies not in its designation as a social grouping but rather in its denotation of a political space whose authority does not rely upon

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force, tradition or the weight of privilege for its legitimacy.

Nevertheless, while as a political or ideological construct the *public* has a certain degree of rhetorical and conceptual force it does not prevent or negate the temptation to think of the *public* in sociological terms. Indeed, in the instance of the literature concerned with the role of the media such an inclination exists side-by-side with exhortations of the more fleeting *abstract* understanding. In eighteenth century political discourse, the abstract sense of the *public* was tied, implicitly at least, to the actions, opinions and inclinations of the physical public. Similarly, the media was positioned as the instrument that bridged the gap between these two senses: its role was conceived and described as a means by which to facilitate the formation and expression of rational-critical opinion on the part of the public of a nation state. For instance, in a quote cited above, Malesherbes specifically couples the new role of the public in political matters with the emergence and flourishing of literacy amongst the larger population. This kind of conceptualization was not something unique to him alone: the literature is rife with similar comparisons and assertions (for examples see Hume, 1912; Kant, 1991; Mill, 1972b; Mill, 1992; Reeve, 1885; Stead, 1886a & 1886b; Tocqueville, 1966; Trenchard & Gordon, 1971). In becoming the forum of a newly emergent and widely constituted public voice, the printing press was considered to be a functional equivalent of the Pnyx and forum of Athens: in many instances the press were described as being analogous to the open-air forums and institutional meetings of "primitive" democracy. The technology of the media, be it in the form of newspapers or contemporary electronic mediums, transformed the notion of community from a place located in a physical space to a psychological, conceptive community that exists in an abstract, theoretical space. In spite of this conceptual alteration, the new sense of community is thought of in both *theoretical* and *sociological* terms. While differences are seen to exist between the two notions of community or *public*, both are conceived of as sharing many of the same qualities: the public is not altered so much as it is enhanced or enlarged. Those properties

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which the public possessed in the spatial-temporal understanding are believed to exist, in slightly modified form, in the newer abstract version (see Tarde, 1969). Nonetheless, by conferring a sense of *corporeality* to the more abstract conception, the intermediation of the media essentially blurred the distinction between the abstract and concrete sense of *public*.

Furthermore, by blurring this distinction the discourse allows for an equation to be made between the claims made on behalf of the *public* as a location or sphere of rational, political power and the actual political performance of the public as a group of individuals. The public as a sphere of the rational exercise of power and the actions of the public within the political system are synthesized into one theoretical and actual entity. The expectations and claims associated with the more abstract sense are transposed onto the political behaviour and conduct of the physical community of a nation state. Consequently, the public remains an *object* whose specific content is determined and defined by the orientation that a speaker takes in regards to it. Concepts like *public opinion*, *the people* or *the public* can function for the speaker as either rhetorical devices, philosophical conceptions or more concrete sociological referents. As Chaney notes: "In mobilising rhetoric the people are always us, a collective self-consciousness, that is proud of believing in or doing certain things. But the people are also always 'the other' an object of ethnographic curiosity that may be sympathised with, pitied, humoured, admired, entertained or patronised, etc (Chaney, 1993, 115)." The selection of one attitude or orientation towards the public by a speaker does not preclude or rule out other possible viewpoints or opinions. In the past, as the location of public opinion and the public moved from the realm of abstraction and rhetoric towards more sociologically rooted definitions, characterizations of them became less and less complimentary. While both senses of *public* reflect and embody different aspects of a larger concept, their respective definitions of what constitutes the true *nature* or *essence* of the public are thereby played off one another by observers in order to advance their specific

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argument or position. That is, the validity of the public-as-ideal is assessed in comparison with the actual performance of the public-as-concrete-reality: likewise, the capability and potential of the *concrete* public is measured against the standards and ideals contained within the rhetorical *abstraction*. As a result, the proposed relationship between the media and the public serves only to highlight the perceived divide that separates prescriptions of how the citizenry *ought* to be participating in politics versus descriptions of how the citizenry actually *is* participating.

Accordingly as much as Habermas and his precursors envision the goal for the media as that of informing the public, its role is also - implicitly - envisaged as a means of guiding and modifying the outlook and opinions of the public so that they are more in line with those values and expressions deemed suitable for a properly functioning democratic government. Under these circumstances, the tasks of the media are conceived not so much as a means of facilitating the development of the individual-as-citizen as they are seen to be an instrument by which the individual-as-individual will be improved (or "transformed"). The prescribed duties of the media are geared towards addressing any lingering anxiety over the agency of the public rather than directly speaking to the requirements of the various institutions within a representative democracy. For instance, as was noted in chapter four, John Stuart Mill regarded the day-to-day practice of newspapers as making them nothing more than vehicles of conformity that did the "thinking" of the people for them (Mill, 1972a, 134). However, the source of Mill's objection lies not so much in the fact that the newspapers undertook the "thinking" of the public, but rather that the "thinking" in the newspapers was performed by individuals all too similar to those found in the public. As opposed to dignitaries from the Church, State or Academy, the public instead took their opinions from a non-specialist and relatively untrained set of individuals: a group much like the public themselves. Mill perceives this as a problem because, in his view, the public was always "a mass, that is to say, collective mediocrity (***Ibid.***)." Accordingly, a government in which public opinion holds sway

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will, in Mill's view, never be able to rise above mediocrity unless it allows itself to be guided by the opinions, counsels and "tone of mind" of a "more highly gifted and instructed One or Few (***Ibid.***)." Even though Mill sees the average man as being lost in the crowd and a sea of mediocrity, he insists that "the honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following the initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with their eyes open (***Ibid.***)." A properly orientated media were one medium by which Mill believed the intellectual horizons and capabilities of the public could be advanced and the utility of open debate best served. Nevertheless, as was noted in chapter four, any amelioration that occurred in the capacity of the public was mainly of benefit to the collective enlightenment of the general populace. The actual substance of governing would be done by a body of professional legislators and bureaucrats, for whom "every hour spent in talk is an hour withdrawn from actual business (Mill, 1972b, 260)."

In spite of the positive conception of the public that guides the overall orientation of the media's tasks (i.e., that they will respond to and incorporate the values and practices of rational-critical discourse), the fundamental soundness and rationality of the public is never taken for granted nor assumed in any unqualified fashion. The media are largely conceived of as instruments by which various opinion leaders can potentially form and influence the attitudes of a dependent secondary audience - the larger mass of citizens. For example, Stead describes the newspaper as the vehicle - sometimes the sole vehicle - by which the minds of individuals, "wearied with daily toil and dulled by carking care," are lifted into a higher sphere of thought and action than is contained in the everyday routine of their workplace (Stead, 1886b, 663). Although the media cannot tell the public what to think, their interpretation of and focus on particular events and issues is believed to play a significant role in determining what the public thinks about as well as the manner (context, terms, weighting) in which they do so. The media are believed to have a

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significant influence upon the direction and flow of debate: W. T. Stead asserted that the journalist "can administer either a stimulant or a narcotic to the minds of his readers; and if he is up to his work and is sufficiently earnest himself, he can force questions to the front which, but for his timely aid, would have lain dormant for many a year (Stead, 1886b, 662)." Through their provision of "fuller and more perfect" knowledge as well as competing interpretations of this information by "sufficiently enlightened" individuals (Mill, 1992, 118, 120), it is believed that the media can facilitate and foster a more rational and thoughtful judgement on the part of the public: "Every subject has the best chance of becoming thoroughly understood when, by the delivery of all opinions, it is presented in all points of view; when all the evidence upon both sides is brought forward, and all those who are most interested in showing the weakness of what is weak in it, and the strength of what is strong, are, by the freedom of the press, permitted, and by the warmth of discussion excited, to devote to it the keenest application of their faculties (Mill, 1992, 127)."

As such, the distinctive qualities suggested by the process of deliberation - thoughtfulness, cautiousness, order and orientation to a common, rather than sectarian, problem - have been seized on by both foes and friends of democracy alike, albeit for opposing reasons (Sanders, 1997, 356). Each side views deliberation as being the gauge by which to confirm their respective convictions about the involvement of public opinion in the process of government. For those opposed to democracy, these standards are invoked so as to demonstrate the extent to which public deliberation plainly fails to meet such criteria. At the same time, democrats assent to these principles so as to directly confront and satisfy any opposition to democracy by employing these objections as standards for the model of how democratic political discussions should function (***Ibid.***). Through the utilization of some form of deliberation, proponents of democracy believe that both it and public opinion will be made more rational, less impulsive and oriented towards communal goals.

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Consequently, another layer of ambiguity is woven into the discussion of the relationship between the media and democracy since the argument for employing deliberation in the democratic context is, to all intents and purposes, the mirror image of the line of reasoning brought against such a practice. The emphasis upon the "peculiar heuristic felicity of democratic political deliberation" has usually stressed the manner in which its open and public character makes possible the identification and evaluation against one another of the whole miscellany of considerations that may prove practically pertinent (Dunn, 1996, 518). Conversely, the principal case against democracy argues that the fundamentally public character of deliberation effectively sabotages or subverts its avowed goal: the production of clear, stable and well-considered outcomes that take due account of the valid interests of all those involved (***Ibid.***). In both instances, the crux of the argument revolves around the manner in which the character of public opinion is appraised. From the realist perspective, public opinion, being essentially and unalterably fickle and transient, is the bane of any attempt to at rational and efficient decision-making. Public opinion, for participatory democrats, when properly trained and guided, is the chief means by which a democracy acquires and sustains its legitimacy. Regardless of the perspective taken, the underlying mistrust of the public's capacity and a concern about its perceived malleability has had a structuring influence upon subsequent conceptions of the role of the media. The media become, in ideal terms, the means by which the "sluggish mind of the general public" is roused and spurred into the appropriately rational and proper discharge of its duties and obligations as citizenry.

Beyond the debate over the potential and actual capability of the public, however, a more fundamental question needs to be asked: does the theory and practice of representative government require the citizenry to engage in an ongoing process of rational-critical deliberation amongst themselves and with the representatives of the state? Clearly, a prevalent belief at work in the Habermasian literature concerned with notions of the *public sphere* is that a population truly

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constitutes itself as a public only through a process of constant communication and interaction. Indeed, it is a premise that, as Habermas puts it: "Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion - that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions - about matters of general interest (Habermas, 1974, 136)." This vision of a conversational public, a public of discussion and deliberation symbiotically linked to the media and the state, is positioned as a key barometer of the health and vibrancy of democracy. The underlying premise is that both the public and the nature of democracy, in ideal terms, are mutually defined and constituted through the process of communication that take place within the confines of the nation state. Such a connection between form and content of public discussion and the character of the political structure is not an entirely new development. In 1806 Thomas Paine observed that "whoever has made observation on the characters of nations will find it generally true that the manners of a nation, or of a party, can be both ascertained from the character of its press than from any other public circumstance. If its press is licentious, its manners are not good (Paine, 1969, 1010)." This proposition has not been examined or acknowledged, yet it may be the most problematic and misconceived aspect in the Habermasian literature.

In this conception of the public - as a specific social formation of rational-critical participants - democratic citizens are defined and constituted through the process of deliberation that takes place within a broadly conceived public space. In turn, the media are viewed as the reflection and embodiment of public discussion by which democracy is conducted and carried out by the citizenry and the representatives of the state. The important point in all this is that although the specific terms involved in this political equation - democracy, public opinion, the public, the media - are historically variable, they define one another in mutual relief:

> Whatever democracy as a way of life may be, it is constituted by particular media of communication and particular arrangements

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> through which politics is conducted: speech and the agora, the colonial newspaper and pamphlet in the taverns of Philadelphia, the omnibus daily in the industrial city, the television network in an imperial nation. Similarly, a medium of communication is defined by the democratic aspirations of politics: a conversation among equals, the organ of a political ideology, a watchdog on the state, an instrument of dialogue on public issues, a device for transmitting information, the tool of interest groups. In addition, the meaning of public opinion gravitates between the abstract and concrete, between public sentiment and public judgement, between references to a concrete way of life, a mode of political action, and the statistical concatenation of individual desires and sentiments (Carey, 1995, 378).

It is a process that is aptly summarized by Carey: "What we mean by democracy depends on the forms of communication by which we conduct politics. What we mean by communication depends on the central impulses and aspirations of democratic politics. What we mean by public opinion depends on both (***Op. Cit.***, 378 - 379)." Even so, while a medium of communication, as Carey notes, is defined by the democratic aspirations of politics it also shaped and influenced by the particular institutional context in which it operates. The media do not autochthonously generate and shape political communication according to their own interest and precepts - though these do have a tangible influence on the manner in which the media convey and construct political messages. This is a key point that is all too frequently overlooked in discussions about the role of the media and its place within the framework of democratic practice and theory. The media function in a political context - in most instances some form of representative democracy - in which communication about public issues takes place in a number of forums and in a variety of ways. Any political role that the media are to have cannot be defined in opposition to or in isolation from the *de facto* structure of government, however it may be constituted.

Similarly, the same also applies to conceptions of the role to be played by the

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public in terms of the necessary requirements and obligations involved in citizenship. In the Habermasian literature concentrating on the viability of the ideals of the public sphere and the concomitant role of the media, contemporary circumstances are generally found wanting. A frequent lamentation concerns the loss of the public as "participants" in the government of their own affairs. For instance, Carey observes that while the word "public" persists in our language "as an ancient memory and pious hope, the public as a feature and factor of real politics has disappeared (***Op. Cit.***, 1995, 392)." The current *role* of the public is likened to that of a passive spectator for whom both the opportunity and stimulation for participation is, directly or indirectly, denied. This portrait suggests that the degree to which the characteristics of a participatory and rational-critical citizenry are manifest within the political process of a nation state is indicative of the overall health and viability of it as a democracy. It also suggests that the absence of this kind of citizenry is somehow indicative of the extent to which such a democracy is both dysfunctional and vulnerable to misrule. This kind of diagnosis, however, results from an understanding of democracy as well as a set of expectations of citizenship quite different from that on which the theory and practice of representative democracy hangs. Furthermore, such a perspective overlooks the extent to which the formal organization of a polity gives shape to the role that the citizen will play as well as the form that necessary and essential political communication will take. Political communication, in the Habermasian literature, is defined and prescribed in a particular kind of light. But the institutional context in which this communication takes place is an important influence on the kind of role that the individual can and will play. Additionally, this institutional environment will determine which forms of communication are the most pertinent in terms of the relationship between the public and the representatives of the state: that is, are the broad norms of reasoned and deliberative discourse necessary to the proper functioning of the citizenry in a representative democracy? An attentive review of a portion of the so-called "classical" democratic theory concerned with the workings of representative

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government reveals that the manifestation of such norms by the citizenry, while desirable, are neither required nor expected by the workings of the institutional process.

That this is the case is especially clear from an examination of the expectations contained in theory of representative government espoused by James Madison - in conjunction with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay - in what has come to be known as The Federalist Papers. Scrutiny of the theory of representative government contained in this work reveals a much different set of assumptions as to what is required or expected from the citizenry in terms of their political duties and functions. Conventional wisdom has tended to misconstrue the theoretical framework of The Federalist Papers, particularly those contributions made by James Madison, as being premised upon a fairly strong anti-democratic skepticism (Marcus, 1988, 28)(**10**). But like those who favoured the full implementation of measures that would permit popular control of government, Madison, as well as Hamilton and Jay, saw popular sovereignty as the only legitimate basis for government. The Federalist Papers's rationale for a particular understanding of and design for the American constitution has had a significant sway upon the subsequent development of the American political system. Moreover, from its arguments (especially those of Federalist 10) a democratic theory relevant to the practical experience of representative government can be elaborated that provides a basis for better evaluating and comprehending the role of and expectations invested in the individual citizen. In this instance, the role of the citizen is not designated by a specific form of communication but rather it is defined and established by the institutional context in which the citizen will function. Such a viewpoint provides a useful corrective to the tendency to dismiss the so-called "classical" democratic theory as being largely utopian and impractical in terms of establishing and understanding real, practical, consequential questions of how to organize a democratic polity (see chapter one of Pateman, 1970): Madison's writings are an instance in early democratic theory in

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which an argument for a general principle is intertwined with an explanation of how this principle was to be institutionally established and acted upon. As well, it embodies an image of the public that strives to maintain a pragmatic balance between utopian and realist aspirations: an ambivalence about the public is utilized as the very basis of the theoretical and practical project being undertaken.

The image of the public elaborated in The Federalist Papers is one that is based upon an acknowledgement of its limitations, faults, strengths and potential. Notably in those "papers" written by James Madison, the perceived deficiencies of the public in regards to their "moral and mental fitness" for political participation are transformed into theoretical virtues. Breaking radically with the traditional understanding of republicanism, Madison rejects civic virtue as a possible foundation for non-oppressive popular government(11). Building upon Hobbesian assumptions about the character of human nature, Madison does not perceive the average individual as being particularly virtuous or motivated by common, selfless interests. Instead, he views individuals as being largely motivated by self-interest and driven by the pursuit and acquisition of power, property or profit. Madison sees reason and self-love as being intimately connected, creating a reciprocal influence on each other: "the former will be objects to which the latter will attach themselves (Federalist 10: Madison et al., 1987, 124)." The selfish attachment to and quest for "pre-eminence and power" are unavoidable aspects of human behaviour that have continually

> divided mankind ..., inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good. So strong is this propensity to fall into mutual animosities, that when no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts (***Ibid.***)."

The diversity of human faculties and the consequent heterogeneity of interests is a product of the fallibility of human nature and reason. For Madison, human reason

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is fallible for three reasons: individuals must classify nature in order to gain an understanding of it, yet objects in both the natural and man-made world (such as institutions of government) are indistinct and not clearly demarcated; human organs of perception and conception are imperfect; and, finally, human language is an imperfect and imprecise vehicle by which to convey an understanding of the complexity of the world and its workings (Federalist 37: Madison et al., 1987, 245; Marcus, 1988, 29). Any one of these reasons will produce a certain degree of obscurity and imprecision. But Madison observes that in political matters it is highly unlikely that the effect of all three could be circumvented by even the most perspicacious individual. Both members of the elite as well as members of the "mass" public are equally subject to the fallibility of their reason, perception and interest. As a consequence, no form of government can escape the impact and effect of the fallible nature of man.

Dissent, conflict and the clash of competing interests are inevitable in any political society because their causes are "sown into the nature of man (Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 124)." The heterogeneity of human faculties and capacities, fallibility in reasoning and judgement, zeal for a quick opinion, attachment to different leaders, diversity of circumstance, as well as a desire for a vast range of different objects - all constitute "insuperable obstacles" to the uniformity in the interpretation of priorities and interests (Held, 1996, 90; Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 124). As well, a diversity of opinion will also be the result of deliberation amongst the more rational and deliberate citizenry: "When men exercise their reason coolly and freely, on a variety of distinct questions, they inevitably fall into different opinions, on some of them. When they are governed by a common passion, their opinions if so they be called, will be the same (Federalist 50: ***Op. Cit.***, 317)." Of these differences and antagonisms Madison argues that "the various and unequal distribution of property" is the most common and durable source of factionalism in any society. Those who hold property and those who are without have invariably formed distinct interests in

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any society. Madison sees all nations as being susceptible to a division into different classes based upon property, "actuated by different sentiments and views (Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 124)." *Faction*, understood by Madison as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community", is the central problem of politics in the nation states (***Op. Cit.***, 123). In this context, Madison believes that there are only two methods of "curing the mischiefs of faction": the first of these attempts to remove its causes; the second strives to control its effects.

For Madison, the formation of factions, sown as it is in the very nature of individuals, is a predetermined and inescapable fact of political life. While rooted in the fallibility of human nature and perception, the latent causes of faction are brought into different degrees of activity according to the social circumstances that prevail in a society. Given this reality, it is a vain hope, in Madison's eyes, to believe that "enlightened statesmen" might be able to adjust these clashing interests and render them subservient to the public good (***Op. Cit.***, 125). Not only is it unlikely that "enlightened statesmen" will always be at the helm of government, it is very doubtful that they could counteract the human tendency towards creating patterns of inequality. For example, the indirect and remote considerations necessary for adjusting of the distribution of property will rarely prevail over the more direct and immediate interests that one party may possess in slighting or disregarding the rights of another or the good of the whole (***Ibid.***). Likewise, Madison believes that neither "moral nor religious motives" can be relied upon as an adequate control or restraint upon a majority with the full power of public authority in their hands and the opportunity to act on their own selfish interest (***Op. Cit.***, 126). He notes that such controls lose their efficacy in proportion to the number of individuals involved, exactly in proportion to the extent that their constraint is required. Consequently,

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Madison comes to the conclusion that since the causes of faction cannot be removed or eliminated, the solution lies in controlling its effects. To this end, Madison sees the cure for "the mischiefs of faction" to reside in ***constitutional*** and ***institutional*** restraints rather than normative or moral ones.

As Madison sees it the task is to regulate the various and interfering interests in such a way so that they are incorporated into the necessary and ordinary operations of government. That is, the object of any "democratic" political structure is to secure both the public good and private rights against the dangers presented by a factional majority without violating the "spirit and form of popular government (Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 1987, 125)." The undertaking at hand is the construction of a polity that accepts as given the ambition and avarice of factions, but acts so as to deflect these impulses in the direction of a common, public good (Krouse, 1983, 63). Whatever form it may take, in Madison's mind, government is a reflection of human nature. As such, it reflects both the positive and negative aspects of human nature: if people possessed angelic natures, neither internal or external controls would be necessary in the institutions of government. But, in a government which is to be administered by individuals over individuals it is fundamental that institutional mechanisms and restraints be in place that control both those who are to be governed as well as those who are to govern (Federalist 51; ***Op. Cit.***, 320).

Instead of viewing the inherent imperfections of the public as a liability that potentially, if not in fact, sabotages the likelihood of popular sovereignty acting as the guide and basis of the process of political decision-making and government, Madison grounds his theory on the assumed existence of human fallibility and an inherent predilection for factionalism. The partiality and heterogeneity of human experience cannot be avoided or circumvented in the practice of politics. In its most abstract, general form the solution seems to lie in discovering the means by which an interested majority is prevented from forming or, if it already exists, is neutralized

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by its "number and local situation" and thereby made "unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression" (Morgan, 1974, 859: Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 1987, 125 - 126). Madison did not endorse diversity as a beneficial feature because it would prevent policy initiatives, but rather because diversity would make it unlikely that pre-existing majorities could impose their will to the detriment of the rights and interests of others (Marcus, 1988, 32). Instead, Madison saw diversity and the resultant political conflict, if deflected through an appropriately devised institutional structure, as a means by which self-serving interests would be transformed into notions of common good before being translated into legislative measures (***Ibid.***).

As a consequence, Madison argues that the model of pure democracy found in Classical Greece is incapable of assuaging the "mischiefs of faction". In a pure democracy, the society consists of a small number of citizens who directly participate in the administration of government. A common passion or interest in such a small, participatory regime, Madison asserts, will "be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert results from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual (Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 126)." He notes that the histories of participatory regimes are marked by frequent disruptions, instability and violent discord in which both the security and rights of the individual and their property have been violated by the transitory passions and humours of the majority. On the other hand, Madison posits that the cure for the "mischiefs of faction" are to be found in what he refers to as a "republic". A republic, as defined by Madison, is characterized by a "scheme of representation" and it is this feature that "opens a different prospect and promises the cure for which we are seeking (***Ibid.***)." Madison asserts that a ***republic*** is distinguished from a ***democracy*** by two central points of difference(**12**). The first of these is the institution of representation by which the functions of government are delegated to a small number of citizens elected by the rest. Secondly, as compared to a "pure" democracy, a republic comprises a "greater number of citizens, and

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greater sphere of country" over which the territory of the republic may be extended (***Ibid.***). Furthermore, the problems of faction are best dealt with through the installation of representative republicanism in a nation state that contains a heterogeneous population in a large territory.

Although representation is one of the central components by which Madison differentiates between "republics" and "pure democracy", he nevertheless acknowledges that it was both known and utilized in ancient republics such as those of Athens, Crete and Sparta. In these "pure" democracies, a number of the executive functions were not exercised by the people, but were instead performed by magistrates elected by the people. However, these magistrates were an organ of government alongside the popular assembly (Manin, 1997, 2). According to Madison, the real difference between the ancient republics and modern ones such as that of America lies in "*the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity*, from any share in the *latter*, and not in the *total exclusion of the representatives of the people* from the administration of the *former* (Federalist 63: Madison et al, 1987, 373 - *emphasis* in original)." As well, in modern circumstances representation is more than just a delegation of political power made necessary because of practical and logistical demands. In light of the latent causes of faction, Madison sees representation as an essentially different and superior political system (Manin, ***Op. Cit.***). The effect of representation, Madison noted, was that it served to refine and enlarge the public views "by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations (Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 126)." Under such modification Madison believed that it was very likely that the "public voice", embodied and pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than that articulated by the people themselves (***Ibid.***). Representation was the institutional means by which selfish interests would, by the device of public deliberation by a set

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of elected officials, be recast so as to serve the common interest. Through the creation of a distance between governmental decisions and popular will, Madison sees representation as a defence to the people against "their own temporary errors and delusions" and "irregular passions" that might stimulate the public (Federalist 63: ***Op. Cit.***, 371). It attends to the mischiefs of faction by permitting the "cool and deliberate sense of the community" to prevail: the elected official is not conceived of as a mere delegate of the people who votes according to their inclinations and wishes. Instead, they function as *representatives* who are to utilize their own judgement in ascertaining what is in the best interest of the polity and how these needs might be best met.

For Madison, representation was the "pivot" of American republicanism (Federalist 63: Madison et al, 1987, 372). It was a means by which a sovereign democratic government could determine and act on notions of a "common" good, while also attenuating the various excesses associated with "pure democracy". By permitting a distance to exist between governmental decisions and the popular will, Madison sees representation as system of government superior to "pure democracy" in very possible way:

> The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust. The elective mode of obtaining rulers is the characteristic policy of republican government. The means relied on in this form of government for preventing their degeneracy are numerous and various. The most effectual one is such a limitation of their term of appointment as will maintain a proper responsibility to the people (Federalist 57: ***Op. Cit.***, 343).

Representation, in Madison's view, provided the potential means by which to enhance and develop a truly common, public perspective through the agency of

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elected representatives before being enacted into legislation. In this characterization of representative government, it is worth noting the underlying distinction being drawn by Madison between those who are "elected" and those who "elect". Elections do not prevent or abolish the emergence of a difference in status and function between the people and the government: the people do not govern themselves in a representative system, but rather, through election, they select a smaller number of individuals to perform this function in their place and interest (Manin, 1994, 136). Election serves as both the means of selecting these representatives as well as, because of their repetition at regular intervals, the instrument by which these representatives are kept "virtuous". This kind of precaution is necessary because of the position and power held by elected representatives as a result of their election to office: due to their election and elevation by their constituents, Madison sees a variety of institutional mechanisms being called for so as to ensure that representatives will act in the interest of the public. He argues that the most "effectual" way to keep representatives "virtuous" is to subject them to frequent election and reelection: "Before the sentiments impressed on their minds by the mode of their elevation can be effaced by the exercise of power, they (the representatives) will be compelled to anticipate the moment when their power is to cease, when their exercise of it is to be reviewed, and when they must descend to the level from which they were raised; there forever to remain unless a faithful discharge of their trust shall have established their title to a renewal of it (Federalist 57, ***Op. Cit.***, 344 - 345)." The prospect of an upcoming election, combined with the desire to continue in office, will ensure that representatives remain suitably focussed upon the interests of their constituents (Manin, 1997, 117). The interests of the people are best served when those citizens possessing suitable merit and judgement are acting as their representatives. Such a group might constitute an elite, but the institution of election will keep them attentive to the interests of those they represent.

On account of this, Madison's transformation of historical necessities into

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theoretical virtues has lead to his theory being labelled "elitist" and "hardly democratic" (Macpherson, 1977, 15 - 16 n. 6); while Madison is described as being a "reluctant democrat" (Held, 1996, 94). However, such characterizations are both misleading as well as a misreading of the theory of representation advanced by Madison in The Federalist Papers. In Madison's argument representatives are not conceived of primarily as the means by interests of an "elite" are protected and preserved. Rather, they are part of an institutional structure that he believes is best able to establish and create serious deliberation and decision-making in public life (Held, 1996, 93). Placing primary control of political power in the hands of representatives is Madison's proposed corrective to the deep intrinsic defects in the politics of the small popular regimes of "pure" democracies (Krouse, 1983, 66). In Madison's view, passion never fails to "wrest the sceptre from reason" in "numerous assemblies" like those of "pure" democracies such as Athens: even if every member had been Socrates, the Athenian assembly would still have been a mob (Federalist 55; ***Op. Cit.***, 336). The centralization of political decision-making in a smaller group of representatives is an attempt by Madison to secure the benefits of free consultation and discussion in popular government. The legislature, in this instance the House of Representatives, may indeed constitute an oligarchy, but Madison asks

> Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscure and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States. They are to be the same who exercise the right in every State of electing the corresponding branch of the legislature of the State (Federalist 57; ***Op. Cit.***, 343).

The electoral system does not require that those who govern are similar to those they govern. If anything, as a process, it will probably produce elected officials who, for one reason or another, are quite distinct from their constituents: ideally, those who are elected would be different in terms of their wisdom, virtue and political talents. At the same time, representatives can be eminent citizens, who are socially and

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intellectually different from the represented, as long as the people consented to place them in power (Manin, 1994, 136 - 137). As such, the government might be drawn from the "elites" of a particular society, but it is still a "democratic" government in that the representatives exercise power as a result of their selection by the people rather than as a result of their wealth and social prominence. The key consideration is that, no matter who the political "elite" is at any given point in time, ordinary citizens were the ones who decided the composition of the elite that exercises the power of government.

In his conception of what republican representation could and should be, Madison sees the representatives, ideally at least, as being different from, and superior to their constituents in that they posses the "most wisdom" and "most virtue" to determine and act on the "common good" of the society. Potential representatives, Madison declares, are those citizens "whose merit may recommend him to the esteem and confidence of his country, No qualification of wealth, of birth, of religious faith, or of civil profession is permitted to fetter the judgement or disappoint the inclination of the people (Federalist 57; ***Op. Cit.***, 344)." The act of delegation entailed in representation is not a envisioned as a random or chance assignment of political power. Representatives are described by Madison as ideally being "proper guardians of the public weal"; as such, it is important that they be of "fit character" to fulfill such a function. Therefore, it is likely that representatives would be different from those who they represented in terms of their talent, virtue and wealth. That this is the case, Madison observes, is, in part, a function of their selection by their fellow citizens: "as they will have been distinguished by the preference of their fellow-citizens, we are to presume that in general they will be somewhat distinguished also by those qualities which entitle them to it, and which promise a sincere and scrupulous regard to the nature of their engagements (***Ibid.***)." It is in this context that one needs to understand Madison's description of the body of elected representatives as a "chosen body of citizens". Madison is clearly playing

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on two senses of the term "*chosen*": the officials are chosen, in the literal sense, since they are elected, but they also, by means of this process of selection, constitute the "chosen Few" (Manin, 1997, 117). A carefully designed and implemented electoral system is, in Madison's eyes, a key means by which to ensure that the people will select the wisest and most virtuous individuals to be their representatives.

Representative rule alone is not a sufficient condition for the protection of all citizens: it cannot in itself ensure that the elected officials will not become or act like an exploitative faction (Held, 1996, 92). The simple act of selecting a representative provides no guarantee against the corruptions and intrigues by which "men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs" might obtain the votes of the people and then betray their trust (Federalist 10; ***Op. Cit.***, 126)." In addition to the frequency with which elections are held, Madison concludes that without a carefully designed electoral system voting could result in the choice of either individuals of republican virtue or others motivated by self-interested ambition and a narrowly parochial vision of the public good (Morgan, 1974, 860). As a result, Madison sees the crucial question as being one of "whether small or extensive republics are more favourable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal (Federalist 10; ***Op. Cit.***, 126 - 127)." In answering this question, Madison offers an argument that flies in the face of traditional republican beliefs about the virtue of scale in public affairs(13). In his opinion, an *extended* republic, covering a large territory and encompassing a sizable population, is a far better precaution against the evils of faction than a small republic. He offers a number of reasons. In the first place, whatever the size of the republic, the number of representatives must be increased to a certain number in order "to guard against the cabals of a few"; and this number should not be so numerous that the representatives fall prey to "the confusion of a multitude" (Federalist 10; ***Op. Cit.***, 127). As well, the number of representatives in a large republic does not have to be proportionally as large as in a small republic to fulfill this condition. Consequently, if the proportion of "fit characters" is constant

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in both a small and a large republic, the former will furnish a greater array from whom the electorate can make their choice and therefore a greater probability that they will select a "fit candidate".

In the next place, since representatives in a large state will be chosen by an extended electorate, "it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried (***Ibid.***)." By "vicious arts" Madison was thinking of the myriad abuses to be found in the various "rotten" electoral boroughs that existed in the United Kingdom: a situation in which the prestige and influence (both financial and otherwise) of representatives "to the manor born" exerted a significant sway upon the decisions of voters - votes were cast due to deference or outright bribery. In an extended republic, Madison believed that the suffrages of voters would be less subject to financial inducements or social pressure and thus be "more likely to centre on men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters (***Ibid.***)." That is, representatives would, in order to secure election, need to appeal to the interests of the whole constituency: attending to the heterogeneous interests present in their constituency would, in Madison's view, impel representatives to adopt a more dispassionate and impartial perspective(14). As well, the larger the size and population of a regime, the greater its social heterogeneity. This, in turn, makes it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to deny the rights of others; and if such a motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel this way to determine their strength or act upon it (***Ibid.***). Conversely, the smaller the society, the greater the chances that it will be socially homogeneous. With a smaller number of distinct parties and interests, there is a greater likelihood that a majority will emerge of the same faction or interest: "the smaller the number of individuals composing a majority, and the smaller the compass within which they are placed, the more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression (***Ibid.***)." Madison sees social diversity as a means by which to create political fragmentation and

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thereby prevent the accumulation of power within any one faction. Finally, the *federal* division of an extended republic provides for a differentiation in the functions of representatives so as to prevent them form becoming too remote or overly attached to the interests of their constituency. Some representatives will be elected to national legislatures where they will be concerned with the "great and aggregate" interests of the entire nation, while others will be elected to serve in state legislatures where they will deal with the "local and particular" interests of the pertinent state (Federalist 10; ***Op. Cit.***, 127).

Madison believes that, for both representatives and represented, democratic politics must be grounded in the heterogeneity and partiality of human experience. The unavoidable truth of political life is that **both** members of the public and their political representatives share a fallible nature and an equally imperfect ability to reason. Consequently, the necessary restraint, clarity of perception and objectivity are, in Madison's view, most likely to be absent from the practice of politics: "It is a misfortune, inseparable from human affairs, that public measures are rarely investigated with that spirit of moderation which is essential to a just estimate of their real tendency to advance or obstruct the public good; and that this spirit is more apt to be diminished than prompted, by those occasions which require an unusual exercise of it (Federalist 37: ***Op. Cit.***, 1987, 242)." Madison's solution is to join republican forms to majoritarian practices to ensure that elected officials will be subject to public exposure and evaluation, with either censure or praise awaiting, as well as to provide a framework in which the public, against its nature, can exercise both reflection and deliberation about political matters (Marcus, 1988, 30). The function of Madison's vision of representative politics in an extended republic is to make possible, if not require, the transformation of interest, "to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens (Marcus, ***Op. Cit.***, 31: Federalist 10: ***Op. Cit.***, 126)."

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In premising his system of politics on faction and diversity, Madison's vision of representative politics entails very different roles for the governed and their governors. On the one hand, representatives are given a fairly specific set of duties and responsibilities: it is into their care that the powers of government are delegated by their election by the rest of the nation (Federalist 10: ***Ibid.***). Representatives act as the trustees of their electors, making up their own minds and exercising their own judgements about their constituents interests and how these might be best met (Held, 1996, 92). On the other hand, no real institutional role was given to the citizenry. In a representative democracy, the role of the citizen is largely confined to giving periodical renewal of the licence to govern (or, on occasion, the dismissal of the licence to govern of one party and its conferral on another political party) (Parry, 1989, 491). Citizens are viewed as the source of political legitimacy and the assigners of political office, rather than the actual *de facto* exercisers of power and governmental authority. To this end, ordinary citizens vote for the candidate most likely to champion the policies they favour to look after the interest of the groups they belong to or are concerned about or the one best suited (in their opinion) to carry out the duties that are entrusted to whoever wins the election (Plamenatz, 1973, 175). Outside of voting at regular intervals for those who will make decisions about policy issues, the citizen takes few political decisions. Consequently, the central act of political communication employed by the citizenry is voting: in his theory of representation Madison saw elections as the key institutional component of popular government.

Although elections were the central act of communication between elected officials and those that voted for them, Madison did not see them as the sole link between the preferences of the people and the decisions of their representatives. While he did not want popular will to govern, neither did he desire to create a system in which the decisions of the representatives would have no connection with what voters want (Manin, 1997, 162). Conducting elections at regular intervals (thereby

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making the licence to govern subject to a time limit) was one means by which to reduce the independence of the representatives. In addition to this, representation was accompanied by the right of the governed to form and express opinions outside the control of the government. Freedom of opinion, in the form of the First Amendment to the constitution of the United States, provided a means whereby the voice of the public could reach those who govern (***Op. Cit.***, 170). During the debate for the adoption of the First Amendment, Madison argued against the inclusion of the right of instruction (or imperative mandates by which voters controlled the votes of their representative). In his address to the chamber of representatives, Madison asserted that the right of the people to make their will known was contained in the amendment as drafted:

> If we mean nothing more than this, that the people have a right to express and communicate their sentiments and wishes, we have provided for it already. The right of freedom of speech is secured; the liberty of the press is expressly declared to be beyond the reach of this government; the people may therefore publicly address their representatives, may privately advise them, or declare their sentiments by petition to the whole body; in all these ways they may communicate their will (Madison, 1987, 415).

Freedom of opinion ensures that the public can express their wishes and, through the vehicle of the media, have a forum in which these claims and demands may be brought to the attention of both those who govern and other citizens. The public expression of these wishes provide representatives with a sense of the mood and inclinations of the public. However, the final decision as to whether they act on or ignore the wishes of people belongs to the representatives alone. It is in the interest of the representatives, especially if they want to continue in office, to pay attention to the opinions about policies expressed by the public in the media. In this regard, the media contribute to the framework in which the will of the people is one of the considerations of the representatives' decision process (Manin, 1997, 170). The only binding will that the citizenry possess over their representatives is expressed in a vote

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(*Op. Cit.*).

While a rational-deliberative citizenry is not an inconvenience for Madison's vision of representative government, neither is it something that is specifically called for by its workings. Indeed, given his view of the fallible nature of individuals, Madison does not expect that the citizenry would instinctively act in such a fashion. But, more importantly, his vision of representative government turns on the elected representatives acting in such a fashion rather than the citizenry that elects them. In the Madisonian vision of politics the role of the citizen, other than that of casting votes at regular intervals in elections is relatively undefined. In order to function properly, representative government does not dictate that citizens be engaged in an ongoing process of rational-critical deliberation. Such an activity is a central component of the duties and role of the representatives since they are the ones responsible for making decisions on the form and implementation of public policy. The citizen, on the other hand, takes a different kind of decision than elected officials. The citizen votes for a party or candidate he or she believes is most likely to govern the country well or promote the interests of the groups she or he cares about or to uphold the principles he or she values (Plamenatz, 1973, 194). Election, in this regard, is like the appointment of a solicitor given powers of attorney to look after an individual's affairs(**15**). The selection of the attorney is based upon an assessment of past performance and present character, rather than a prediction of how this representative will deal with largely unpredictable, future problems (Parry, 1988, 492 - 493). As a result, the voter does not require the kind of information or process of deliberation necessary for the representative to competently perform their duties. It is a different kind of decision that the voter takes as compared to the expert or elected official: the criteria of understanding and rationality at work in such a decision are of a different order (Plamenatz, 1973, 193). In these circumstances, citizens can take a decision based on an understanding of which constellation of interests support the particular parties or on the basis of a party or candidate retaining

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the confidence of a person whom they trust: in either instance, given the fallible nature of human judgement and reasoning, their choice can be called a reasonable one (***Op. Cit.***, 196).

This kind of understanding of the role of the citizen is one that is quite different from the one which tends to be utilized in the Habermasian literature concerned with the role of the media. Anxiety over citizens' democratic character and their capacity for self-governance has been an abiding feature of discussions and arguments over the prospects and merits of democratic politics (see Neuman, 1986). This continuing ambivalence about the presence and involvement of the public within the political process has subverted the development of a genuine theory of the relationship between the media and democracy. In the Habermasian literature, as a result of the concern to increase and strengthen the rational-critical capacities of the public, the media are conceived of functioning as an instrument by which the citizenry is to be integrated into a particular vision of the political process: one that is more rational, prudent and orientated towards a larger communal purpose and interest. Within this vision, the process of communication, often characterized as the "public life on which democracy depends", needs to be more than just the sheer technical ability of governments to send and receive messages to and from a diverse and dispersed population. As such, the media's political goal is to simulate a form of political practice of spatial and temporal ubiquitousness that its introduction cannot but help to transform and significantly alter. But the conscription of the media in the sustainment of a model of politics based on the *agora*, town hall or legislature involves much more than the replication of a determinate spatial unity. More than this, the role of the media is to forge individual citizens as participants in a particular mode of discussion (Miller, 1993, 135). In these circumstances the equivocal image of the public played a direct role in how the function and purpose of the media were understood and conceptualized. Correspondingly, Habermasian understandings of the role of the media are premised on expectations of what the

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public - in ideal terms - should be in a democratic system: active, rational-critical participants in an ongoing dialogue about issues of public importance.

Besides whatever positive connotations that such a project might have for the overall character of the public sphere, it also implicitly confirms the incapacity of the public, or at least an *untutored* public, to participate in this arena (Carey, 1995, 391). In the Habermasian understanding, the media become, at the expense of other political entities like the public and political parties, the main mechanisms by which deliberation is sparked and sustained. While the role of the media is enhanced, the role of the public, political parties and other organizations in the process of public discussion are sidetracked, if not effectively discarded. The media become the main sphere, context and agency through which public discussion is to take place: other possible actors within the public realm are denied any significant role within it. Consequently, the political process becomes, as Robert Entman (1989) put it in the title of his book, a "democracy without citizens". Instead, the roles left to the public are those of being consumers of or spectators to the process of public deliberation occurring within the media (Carey, ***Op. Cit.***).

Moreover, the Habermasian assumption that the public suffers from an incapacity requiring the transmission, through the media, of a particular set of skills and educational background so that individuals can participate in a "responsible" manner in the process of government places the call for such an enhanced form of democracy in some jeopardy. For if popular sovereignty is not unconditional, but instead presupposes the cultivation of a particular outlook, bearing and capacity on the part of the citizenry, then the concept of democracy being proposed is significantly compromised (Aronowitz, 1993, 87). The implicit removal of the public from the substance of public life due to a perceived incapacity in terms of their political competence qualifies the nature of access to the democratic *polis*. Access is no longer universal but instead is conditional upon the possession and exhibition

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of particular skills and resources. Participation in the democratic process becomes linked to a set of standards that tacitly contravene any notion of egalitarian and unconditional access to the process of self-rule. People are judged capable of self-rule to the degree which they demonstrate a specific set of abilities and body of knowledge. Above all else, this understanding further entrenches a measure of uncertainty that has been attached to the public and its role within discussions of democracy. To the degree that the task of the media is one of improving the political competence of the public, conceptions of the role of the media are directly shaped by the ongoing anxiety over the political capacity and capability of the public rather than an understanding of the particular function and role of the public-as-citizens.

A conception of democracy as a ongoing, deliberative process places exceptional demands on the individual (for maturity, autonomy, and discursive engagement) at precisely those moments when other kinds of responses (avoidance, acquiescence, wishful thinking, fundamentalist assertion or militant struggle) will seem to offer much more in the way of reward or satisfaction (Warren, 1996, 243). More significantly, such a conception of democracy misconstrues and overstates the actual function of the citizen within the structures of representative government. Representative democracy is not a system in which the public governs itself, but rather a system in which public policies and decisions are made subject to the verdict of the people through the election or dismissal of representatives (Manin, 1997 192). As such, the central act of political communication between representatives and those they represent is that of voting. Taken at face value, the significance of such a statement may appear somewhat inconsequential. However prosaic it may appear on the surface, it nonetheless underscores the presence of a particular institutional environment and theoretical framework within which all agents within the political process (government, political parties, interest groups, citizens, media, etc.) must operate.

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As opposed to the questions about the relative political competence or capacity of the public, it is through consideration of the kind of role that the institutions and processes of representative government require and create for the citizenry that a clearer conception of the role of the media ***can*** and ***should*** play in democracy will emerge. The understanding of citizenship contained in the Madisonian conception of representative democracy suggests that the central role of the media, instead of being one of transformation or rational-critical deliberation, is best conceived of in terms of *publicity*: the media's role is one of making both information and opinion "public" and accessible to all. The next chapter will explore how a revised conception of the media as agents of *publicity* provides a lucid theoretical understanding and explanation of the role of the media within a democracy.

Endnotes

1. The designation of a "classical democratic theory" is in itself a point of some contention. The central concern is that such a classification suggests the presence of a single, static and cohesive school of thought. Both Pateman (1970) and Krouse (1983) argue the so-called "classical democratic theory" is not an united and cohesive entity, but rather a diverse and discontinuous one in both "its" aim(s) and intentions. Plamenatz (1973) argues that the earlier democratic rhetoric often designated as the "classical" tradition was, in fact, an argument in favor of a political system rather than an explanation of how the machinery of democratic government would work. While acknowledging that such a designation is problematical, the present discussion will use it as an useful and convenient form of shorthand. A more sophisticated reading of this "classical" democratic tradition can be found in Held, 1996.

2. While Plato's pupil, Aristotle, was no friend to democracy he was more inclined to concede the possibility that collective judgement might be sound in both principle and practice. In The Politics he notes that "it is possible that the many, no one of whom taken singly is a sound man, may yet, taken all together, be better than the few, not individually but collectively, in the same way that a feast to which all contribute is better than one supplied at one man's expense (Aristotle, 1981, 202: 1281a39)."

3. The exact character and mechanism of this transformation is a subject on which

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scholars have differed as to the exact details. For a representative sample of such views see Gunn, 1983; Baker, 1990; Habermas, 1989a; Ozouf, 1988.

4. Schumpeter's Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1962) is the seminal and most influential statement of this line of theoretical revision.

5. Arguments against the restricted, elitist definition of democracy have been grouped together under the label of "participatory democracy". As is so often the case with such taxonomy a homogeneity of vision is implied where there is only heterogeneity. However, while they differ in their prescriptions for the kinds of participation and institutions required, participatory democrats are united by their vision of possibilities quite different from the realities of contemporary politics (Hanson & Marcus, 1993, 3). Barber (1984) and Pateman (1970) are two of the better known arguments in favour of the expansion and extension of the sweep and scope of political participation.

6. Lippmann believes that "If the newspapers,..., are to be charged with the duty of translating the whole public life of mankind, so that every adult can arrive at an opinion on every moot topic, they fail, they are bound to fail, in any future one can conceive they will continue to fail. ... Unconsciously the theory sets up the single reader as theoretically omnicompetent, and puts upon the press the burden of accomplishing whatever representative government, industrial organization, and diplomacy have failed to accomplish (Lippmann, 1922, 362)." Lippmann posits that the media are "very much more frail than the democratic theory has as yet admitted (***Ibid.***)." In part, this is due to what Lippmann describes as the "limited" nature of the news - in that it functions like a constantly roving searchlight - and the illimitable complexity of society.

7. Even Dewey's more sympathetic critics have found the argument of The Public and its Problems to be "maddeningly obscure" (Carey, 1989a, 78). Accordingly, the reading of Dewey espoused here is one suggested more by the secondary literature than by the primary material. It is an extrapolation, however, that is quite consistent with Dewey's general inclination and direction.

8. Tarde notes that "We shall never know and can never imagine to what degree newspapers have transformed, both enriched and levelled, *unified in space* and *diversified in time*, the conversations of individuals, even those who do not read papers but who, talking to those who do, are forced to follow the groove of their borrowed thoughts. One pen suffices to set off a million tongues (Tarde, 1969, 304)."

9. The problems inherent in such a technological deterministic outlook, be it Nineteenth or Twentieth century in origin, are outlined in Warner, 1993.

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10. See Morgan, 1974 for a concise summary of conflicting interpretations of and judgements on Madison's thought.

11. At times, however, Madison did endorse the traditional republican orthodoxy. For example in Federalist 55 he notes that "as there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government: and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another (Federalist 55: Madison et al, 1987, 339)."

12. Krouse makes the point that by Madison's semantic maneuver contains an important political objective. Earlier theorists in the republican tradition had employed the terminology of "democratic republic" or used the two term interchangeably. By defining the terms in the manner that he did, Madison transfers the full pejorative connotation carried by the term "democracy" onto participatory regimes, while assigning the more favorable term "republic" to primarily representative forms (Krouse, 1983, 64).

13. Morgan notes that this particular element of Madison's theory is not an explanatory theory to the effect that an increase in territory and population will prevent the dominance of factions, but rather that it is a probabilistic causal theory of representation (Morgan, 1974). Morgan observes that Madison states no sufficient cause in his theory. Instead, he lists a number of necessary conditions in an extended republic that will *probably* result in the selection of "representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and to schemes of oppression" (Federalist 10; ***Op. Cit.***, 128: Morgan, 1974, 860).

14. James Fishkin (1995) observes that the probability of this aspect of Madison's argument has been undermined by the advances made in the "instruments" by which electoral campaigns are carried out. Given the developments made in media technology, Fishkin speculates that the "vicious arts" of campaigning might even be better practiced to large masses, disconnected as people are from opportunities for face-to-face political discussion (Fishkin, 1995, 52). However, while the "vicious arts" might be better practiced in such a situation, Fishkin overlooks the fundamental ambiguity of the mass media in regards to electoral manipulation. Given the fact that elections are a repeated phenomenon in political life, the "vicious arts" of campaigning have a finite shelf life. By virtue of the same mechanisms and conditions of "publicity" that allow candidates to reach a large number of dispersed

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voters, the process and mechanics of campaign are also subject to a similarly intense gaze. Mediated visibility is a double-edged sword: the media provide both opportunity as well as substantial risk to public figures (Thompson, 1995, 140). As such, the extent to which Madison's argument for a large republic is in need of revision, in this particular instance, is perhaps not as great as Fishkin's observation might imply.

15. The image of the representative-as-solicitor is drawn from Plamenatz (1973).

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Chapter Seven:

The Public Sphere and Democracy - An Ambivalent Relationship

> *The danger of ancient liberty was that men, exclusively concerned with securing their share of social power, might attach too little value to individual rights and enjoyments. The danger of modern liberty is that, absorbed in the enjoyment of our private independence, and in the pursuit of our particular interests, we should surrender our right to share in political power too easily.*

Benjamin Constant, The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns

Conceptualizations of *the discussion of public matters* are usually coached in a language that is strongly suggestive of the experience of direct individual face-to-face communication albeit one which is extended, relayed and transmitted through the technology of the media. Invocation of this kind of terminology is not taken lightly or in vain. Rather, it is employed by advocates of democracy to answer and annul longstanding objections to mass participation in the political process. A great deal of these objections revolve around the prudence of entrusting any amount of decision-making power to the mass population of a nation-state. There is a long-standing and deep-seated distrust of the ability of the *many* to exercise the power of government in a reasonable and balanced manner to the benefit of all. This suspicion about democracy as a regime form, its cultural style, its prospective practical consequences, and its ethical pretensions is one that is shared by both advocates and critics of democracy (Dunn, 1996, 512). Like the image of democratic politics as the *gathering together* of all the citizenry in one place to discuss and decide matters of public interest, this uneasiness can trace its lineage back to ancient Greece.

Advocates in favour of democracy stress the necessity of an institutional

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structure that allows for an exchange of information, a degree of reflection, and exposure to diverse views (Sunstein, 1998, 232). As Robert Dahl notes, democracy has usually been conceived of as a system of "rule by the people" in which it is more than likely that the people will get what it wants, or what it believes to be the best: "But to know what it wants, or what is best, the people must be enlightened, at least to some degree (Dahl, 1989, 111)." This is a point that is taken up and magnified in Habermas inspired discussions of the relationship between the media and the political process. A properly functioning democracy needs an informed and enlightened *demos*. Without the occasion for adequate reflection and discussion the will of the majority merely becomes the exercise of power legitimated through sheer numerical strength and an associated, if tacit, threat of force. It is not public opinion in its raw and unfiltered form that should govern or determine the decisions to be made, but rather *enlightened* public opinion which has had some opportunity to educate itself by fully considering all the relevant and pertinent information and appraising a variety of alternate possibilities and solutions. The formation of this common opinion as well as the provision of the forum within which it can take place is seen to be the main task of the media: in this regard, the media operate as instruments of *transformation* in that their role is one of *enlightening* or *educating* the mass public so that they are able to properly discharge the tasks of citizenship. However, in order to understand correctly the role played by the media it is vital that the *tasks of citizenship* and what they entail for the public are envisaged in terms of the requirements of the institutions and procedures of the relevant political system. Likewise, it is also important that the extent to which *public opinion*, no matter how enlightened or otherwise composed, governs or influences the process of decision-making is comprehended in terms of the concrete practices and institutions of the system of government. The standards to which the media and public opinion are held in theoretical terms should be similar to the ones to which they are held by the concrete workings of the state. The media do not operate in isolation from the nature of the state and the institutions of government: the role and the character of the media

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is heavily influenced by the practices of the government and its overall institutional structure.

This chapter will examine and elaborate upon two interrelated themes that have been an integral part of the preceding discussion. First, it will review and consider the apparent ambivalent impact of the media on the political process in regards to its consequence(s) for the theoretical focus and conceptual direction of Habermas's understanding. Foregrounding the media as the pivotal place for and of public discussion serves to only distort and over-extend any assessment of the actual role played by the media in the democratic process. Too exclusive a concentration upon the media as an institution of the public sphere potentially overlooks the degree to which both the information conveyed and role played by the media have been shaped and moulded by the presence and workings of other governmental and non-governmental institutions. Secondly, it will also analyse the extent to which the Habermasian position misreads and misconstrues the institutions and objectives of representative democracy in terms of being a suitable manifestation of democratic government as the "rule of the people". Within this body of literature, the overriding concern is that the media *should* construct a role for the citizen that emphasizes and features those qualities and properties thought suitable to the needs of democracy. However, the role of the ordinary citizen is fashioned more by the procedures and institutions of the political process than by the workings and products of the media. Rather than what should the media do, the challenge is one of properly conceiving the practice of politics within representative democracy and its institutions. The manner in which one views the political process, in terms of its goals and orientation, will suggest ways that both the role of the media and the character of the public sphere can be conceived so as to avoid the ambiguity that currently surrounds them in the literature. As argued in the preceding chapters, a portion of the ambivalence surrounding the democratic role of the media in the Habermasian position can be attributed to the underdeveloped, if theoretically ambiguous, conception of

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democracy to which the service of the media is pledged: it is this same conception that also serves as the Habermasian benchmark by which the performance of the media is measured. If the role of the media is to be adequately ascertained it is necessary that the democratic process and institutions within which they operate are also understood. In general, the principles that animate the media have been inadequately conceptualized: as well there has been some confusion over what principles do motivate the media versus what ones ***should*** inspire them. Review of these two points will allow for the development of an understanding of the media and their role that properly situates them within the context of the institutional matrix of representative government. Such a positioning suggests that the central role of the media, instead of being one of *transformation* or rational-critical deliberation, is best conceived of in terms of *publicity*: the media's role is that of making both information and opinion *public* and accessible to all.

Although the media are repeatedly positioned as the principal vehicles by which an autonomous democratic life and practice will be fostered and sustained, they are habitually rendered as being a paradoxical force in the Habermas inspired literature. A sense of ambiguity about the impact and potential of the media has been present since its emergence upon the political stage. From the seventeenth century onwards, the media have been viewed as either tools for political liberation and social-economic progress, or for political emasculation and the perpetuated dominance of either economic elites or the masses. When the newspaper press first emerged, arguments about its political role and potential were often made in an openly hostile environment (Aspinall, 1949; Keane, 1991). In England, the growth of the popular press and the spread of literacy were viewed as dubious, if not downright dangerous achievements. Edmund Burke and others feared that the press was the vehicle through which the subversion of religion, morals and public order would be accomplished (Keane, 1991, 34). Theory and rhetoric regularly employed language that depicted a free and independent press as the bastion of freedom; in

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practice, journalists were considered to be uneducated, ill-mannered hacks and demagogues either in the pay of politicians or actively engaged in the instigation of civil unrest or fomentation of sedition (Boyce, 1978, 20). In different countries throughout Europe the press were subject to a number of repressive and censorious measures ranging from the imposition of heavy stamp duties and taxes to terms of imprisonment for editors and writers who offended the frequently delicate sensibilities of powerful ruling elites.

While early espousals on the role of the press can be particularly breathless and all-encompassing in the breadth and reach of their claims, the acknowledgment of a link between the press, liberty and the extension of political democracy did not necessarily imply or automatically beget approval (Sparks, 1988, 209). For example, Thomas Carlyle articulated an equation that well embodies the rhetorical embellishment and argumentative thrust common to the proselytes of the free press: "Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable (Carlyle, 1935, 214)." However, he did not see this state of affairs as necessarily or automatically being a very good thing: "What the best arrangement were, none of us could say. But if you ask, Which is the worst? I answer: That which we now have, that Chaos should sit umpire in it: this is the worst. To the best, or any good one, there is yet a long way (***Op. Cit.***, 218)." Similarly, enthusiasm for a *free press* could wax and wane even for the most impassioned of proponents. Thomas Jefferson's remark that he preferred "newspapers without a government" over "a government without newspapers" is habitually cited in discussions of the media's political role (Jefferson, 1904, 253). Yet equally prevalent in Jefferson's correspondence are statements noting "that a suppression of the press could not more completely deprive the nation of its benefits, than is done by its abandoned prostitution to falsehood. Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle (Jefferson, 1905b, 417)."

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Uncertainty about the media and their political impact continues, relatively unabated, to the present. Regardless of whether optimistic or pessimistic judgements are rendered on the media's performance, a principal contention within the Habermas influenced literature is that "the free flow of information and communications is essential to a democratic society and thus democracy requires that powerful instruments of information be accessible to all. ... Without a *free* flow of information, citizens cannot be adequately informed and without access to forums of public discussion and debate, citizens are excluded from the dialogue that constitutes the very heart of participatory democracy (Kellner, 1995, 338 - 339: *emphasis* in original)." However, as discussed in chapter three, the prevailing conclusion reached in the general literature is that the current impact of media is not one that enhances or significantly benefits democratic politics. This kind of judgment is ably summarized by Golding's avowal that "the lamentable but inevitable conclusion that must be drawn from research over the past couple of decades is that the communications media have failed democracy. If our ideal but none the less worthy intention is that citizens should be afforded an opportunity adequately to inform themselves about social and political process, then the media as currently constituted do rather less than serve this need (Golding, 1990, 100)." Although the media are thought to have the potential to function as a space where the public can form itself and its interests in the process of communication, numerous critics maintain that the public sphere in the United States and Britain has been steadily shrinking over the last few decades. As a result, the likelihood that democratic ideals will be furthered through the media as presently organized is held to be very slight.

A pivotal belief at work within the Habermasian literature is that the dynamics of democracy and the practices of communication within the media are directly and invariably connected. In light of this linkage, some observers see a concern for the state of democracy as automatically necessitating a concern about the potential and actual practice of the media (Dahlgren, 1995). Given the way in which

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politics is practised in a growing number of twentieth-century democracies, it is not altogether surprising that the media are seen to be crucial to any theory of democracy in which government is supposed to be responsive to genuine, independently considered - as opposed to manipulated - public preferences (Entman, 1989, 9). After all, as Smith notes, politics within mass society is inextricable from the technology that provides much of the contact between the few and the many (Smith, 1973, 114). For most of the public contemporary political life is constituted through its immersion in a media-dominated world (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, 4). The discussion and understanding of the issues that compose the public debate of citizens and politicians is, by and large, based on the pictures and information provided by the media: on occasion this debate is even conducted through the media (Cook, 1998). Besides being perceived as the prime source for information on the actions of government, it is believed that the nature of what the media communicate about political institutions and officers affects how the public carries out and perceives their democratic task (Alger, 1996, 189). In a representative system the public must make electoral choices on legislators; by doing this they determine which political party will control the basic direction of government. Consequently, the public needs to obtain news and information that is "comprehensive yet interesting and understandable, that conveys facts and outcomes, not cosmetic images and airy promises" so that these choices both reflect their values and concerns, as well as hold those in power accountable (Entman, 1989, 18).

When fully serving public interest, mass media are seen to be aiding and abetting the communication essential to the formation and maintenance of a public sphere (Aufderheide, 1991, 169): the social spaces, such as town meetings, community groups and the mass media where the public can constitute itself and its interests in the process of communication. Implied within any understanding or definition of the *conversation of democracy* is a prescription of the role to be fulfilled by the media. Within the Habermasian literature, the things which the media are

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supposed to do define how the public sphere will be composed, sustained and, in turn, understood. That is, the public sphere at its most far-reaching and diffused is seen as being largely constituted through the activities of the media. The relationship between the media and the public sphere is like that between yin and yang: both are separate entities which combine to make a larger, more complete whole. At the same time, the public sphere is made up by other forms of communication besides those found in the media. As Habermas observes "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body (Habermas, 1974, 136) (1)." The significance of the role played by the media, however, is that they allow for these "portions" (or *partial publics*) of the public sphere to link up with one another and exchange their views as well as concurrently accessing any relevant information.

Whatever their particular form or format, the media, as technological entities, do not possess an inherent ability or predisposition to serve or undermine democracy or any other form of political rule. Likewise, the media do not have an intrinsic position on democracy. Rather, they are essentially paradoxical in this regard (Hoynes, 1994, 164; see also Pool, 1983 & Sclove, 1995). That is, as Habermas notes in The Theory of Communicative Action, the media innately possess tendencies toward both democratization and social control. Furthermore, he suggests that it is impossible to remove one side of this paradox from the other:

> Insofar as mass media one-sidedly channel communication flows in a centralized network - from the centre to the periphery or from above to below - they considerably strengthen the efficacy of social controls. But tapping this authoritarian potential is always precarious because there is a counterweight of emancipatory potential built into communication structures themselves. Mass media can simultaneously contextualize and concentrate processes of reaching understanding, but it is only in the first instance that they relieve interaction from yes/no responses to criticisable validity claims. Abstracted and clustered though they are, these communications cannot be reliably shielded from the possibility of opposition by

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responsible actors (Habermas, 1987, 390).

The occurrence of such a paradox partially illuminates the difficulty involved in making a definitive judgement about the impact of the media on the political process. Nevertheless, the presence of these innate contradictions within the media-as-technology does not satisfactorily or wholly explain the widespread equivocation to be found in evaluations of the current political performance of the mass media.

While the litany of media dysfunctions inspire copious amounts of analysis, the examination and explication of what exactly the media is to do in the service of democracy are textbook illustrations of brevity and concision. Critics are more than ready to pass judgment, but they are less willing or concerned to formulate or clarify the standards on which such a judgment is made (McQuail, 1994, 236). All too often in both the general and Habermasian literature, the role of the media is presented as an integral and almost sacrosanct unity that is tragically thwarted by the suspect scruples of ideologically motivated press magnates or fatally compromised in some fashion as a corollary of the profit-driven operating logic of capitalism. Although expressed in a number of ways, a central assumption in the Habermasian literature about the media and democracy is that the continued discrepancy between the ideals and practice of the media effectively undermines their capacity to serve and discharge the democratic objectives consigned to their care. In the rendering of such judgements, claims about the importance of a *dynamic and open public communications system* to a properly functioning democracy are imparted in comparatively condensed form. This tends to be the case since the author in question generally wants to move onto what they perceive as the real business at hand – the analysis and criticism of the present operation of the media and prescriptions for the amelioration of its performance in regards to democratic ideals and expectations.

Implicit within the Habermas inspired approach is the premise that the

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survival of democracy is contingent upon the media being managed and functioning in the public interest. But, such a presupposition, in effect, transforms any potential to be attached to the media into a deeply contradictory one. In essence, it simultaneously conceives the extent to which the mass media dominate and influence the aesthetic and intellectual landscape as a source of both despair **and** hope. As well, the meta-discourse at work assimilates and incorporates this paradox as a central normative and descriptive dimension from which it builds the consequent theoretical body: the degree to which the impact of the media is politically dysfunctional is to be corrected by renewed utilization and application of the media. Thus, whether the media live up to the democratic expectations placed upon them becomes a function of matters arising from their operation and overall orientation to the public sphere: questions of **how** the media perform thereby take precedence over questions of **what** the media should do. In this light, contentions like James Curran's that discussion of the democratic role of the media is unavoidably bound up with a debate about how the media should be organized are, on the surface, accurate, logical descriptions of and prescriptions for how analysis should precede (Curran, 1996, 81). With the problem so defined, the possibility that the uncertainty of the media's democratic performance and impact may be the result of other factors is not really considered or pursued with any vigour. However, far from being a settled issue the political role of the media is fraught with several ambiguities that serve to frustrate the democratic promise regularly, and uncritically, linked to it as a medium. Moreover, questions of whether or not the media are managed in the public interest only reveal one aspect of the ambivalence contained within the Habermasian literature. Questions about how the media are constituted in terms of ownership and operation and how these arrangements may be made more beneficial to democracy are crucial matters altogether deserving of attention and consideration. But before complete concentration can be turned over to such concerns it is imperative that the media's traditional prerogatives and responsibilities are also subject to a similarly thorough and searching examination. At the core of such concerns is the question of

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how the relationship between the media and democracy is understood and conceptualized.

This is not to say that there have not been attempts to reconsider and reformulate the relationship between the media and democracy within the literature influenced by Habermas's understanding. For example, although he draws a "qualified" inspiration from Habermas's model, John Keane's The Media and Democracy is an attempt at developing a "revised theory of freedom of communication capable of making sense of late twentieth-century media developments" (Keane, 1991, 35). Likewise, James Curran, in a number of essays, has also endeavoured to "rethink" the democratic role of the media (see Curran, 1991a; 1991b; 1996). However, these efforts to review and revise definitions of the political role of the media do not advance beyond the general and prevailing inclinations of this body of literature. For instance, Curran's efforts to reappraise arguments about the media have tended to directly link questions of the media's role and those of their organization (2). In one article he asserts that implicit within "rival theories and historical accounts of the media" are alternative "prescriptions for organizing the media (Curran, 1991a, 27)." After briefly reviewing the main tenets of the traditionalist theory of the media Curran argues that

> one problem with this approach is that it fails to take adequate account of the way in which power is exercised through capitalist and patriarchal structures, and consequently does not consider how the media relate to wider social cleavages in society. It also ignores the way in which interests have become organized and collectivized, and so does not address the question of how the media function in relation to modern systems of representation in liberal democracies. Consequently, it has nothing useful to say about the way in which the media can invigorate the structures of liberal democracy (***Op. Cit.***, 29).

Accordingly, Curran believes any attempt at invigorating the structures of liberal democracy requires that the media be organized in a fashion that will cause them to

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be more representative or progressive (***Op. Cit.***, 38).

Nonetheless, such an approach fails to take adequate account of additional reasons why the media are not invigorating liberal democracy. In part, this occurs because of the manner in which Curran perceives the problem-at-hand and how he subsequently structures his analysis. The central contention guiding Curran's argument, in each of the cited articles, is that "what is needed are practical measures which will strengthen the critical vigilance of the media rather than a complacent endorsement of one system (Curran, 1996, 90)." In examining the traditional *liberal* theories of the media, Curran's central divergence with them is the manner in which they envisage the interaction between the organization of the media and their prescribed duties. Although he disagrees with the traditionalist theory's reliance upon the market as the means of securing the media's independence as an institution, Curran's own conception of what the media should be doing in a democracy is remarkably similar to the conventional view. To wit, he believes "a basic requirement of a democratic media system should be, ..., that it represents all significant interests in society. It should facilitate their participation in the public domain, enable them to contribute to public debate and have an input in the framing of public policy. The media should also facilitate the functioning of representative organizations, and expose their internal processes to public scrutiny and the play of public opinion. In short, a central role of the media should be defined as *assisting the equitable negotiation or arbitration of competing interests through democratic processes* (Curran, 1991a, 30: *emphasis* in original)."

Correspondingly, a similar orientation and perspective can be found in Keane's <u>The Media and Democracy</u>. Keane describes his essay as a guide to rethinking the relationship between the media and democracy. Like Curran, Keane goes about assessing the relevance of "classical" ideals about the *liberty of the press* at a time of transnational media conglomerates and various electronic media and

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digital technologies. While Keane identifies a number of internal problems and blind-spots in the classical theories, his primary focus is centred around questions of ownership and organization. In particular his dominant concern is to "engage and criticize" claims made on behalf of advocates of market liberalism in regards to public policies concerning the media. Against these claims, Keane develops and argues in favour of a revised "public service model" that would encourage a bona fide plurality of views and sentiments (Keane, 1991, xi). To this end, Keane asserts that an appropriately democratic media should aim "to facilitate a genuine commonwealth of forms of life, tastes and opinions, to empower a plurality of citizens who are governed neither by despotic states nor by market forces. It should circulate to them a wide variety of opinions. It should enable them to live democratically within the framework of multilayered constitutional states which are held accountable to their citizens, who work and consume, live and love, quarrel and compromise within independent, self-organizing civil societies which underpin and transcend the narrow boundaries of state institutions (Keane, 1991, 126)." While the manner in which they express their ideals of the media are admittedly quite different from "classical" theories of the political role of the media, the aims that Curran and Keane attach to the media-as-democratic-institution are remarkably comparable in terms of their content and overall direction.

In rethinking the relationship between the media and democracy both Curran and Keane strive to "recreate the media as a public sphere in a form that is relatively autonomous from both government and the market (Curran, 1991a, 52)." The media's inability to meet and fulfil the democratic expectations invested in it is attributed to the antagonistic goals arising from their simultaneous existence as both private commercial entities and public political ones. However, any ambivalence that might reside in Curran and Keane's understanding of the role of the media apart from questions of ownership and operation is left unexamined by their mutual focus upon questions of how a more democratic media should be organized. Instead, the

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consequent theoretical and practical undertaking is one dedicated to ensuring that the media are organized so that they can operate in a way that best accomplishes the goal of "a free dialogue among equal participants oriented toward their common purpose" (Spragens, 1990, 126). But, beyond the identification of the obstacles that are preventing the media from advancing assorted democratic needs and goals, there also lies the consideration of how the media's political role is defined and conceived.

Occasionally, contemporary critics acknowledge that other hints of ambivalence can be detected in understandings of the media's role in the political process. Lichtenberg, for example, notes that the increased importance of the media in the political process creates a latent ambiguity in how its role is envisaged. For traditional formulations the media are conceived as neutral observers of the political scene. In this view, the media are part of the process but they are also not part in that they stand outside the institutions of government and reports what they "see". Yet, as a result of developments in the relationship between the media and the political process, such a view is inadequate. Today, the media, in Lichtenberg's eyes, are one of the primary actors on the political scene, capable of making or breaking political careers and issues (Lichtenberg, 1990b, 1). Lichtenberg goes onto to declare that the "seeming undeniability" of the idea of the media as being more than mere observers of the political process provides an important impetus for rethinking the "traditional prerogatives and responsibilities of the press." Yet, this revaluation, as envisioned by Lichtenberg, is only concerned with the problem of whether regulation of the media is justified (***Ibid.***). Once again, the proper course for resolution of any ambiguity in the role or performance of the media is seen to lie primarily in questions of their ownership and matters of operation deriving from this aspect.

Frequently described, by the Habermas inspired literature, in terms that place them at the centre of democratic practice, the customary role assigned to the media is one of providing a space where enlightened and enlightening public discussion can

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take place. Although the position of the media is often identified in such a manner, their function is examined in isolation from the larger concerns of and issues in theories of democracy. The central question animating the critical and normative focus of this long-running debate has concerned the role played by the media in political participation: "How far do the mass media provide a public sphere in which citizens may debate issues in a democratic forum and in which those in power may be held accountable to the public (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, 9)?" In answering this question the tendency in the Habermasian literature has been to focus upon the performance of the media vis-a-vis the standards thought proportionate and appropriate to a healthy and thriving democracy. As a result, this has lead to an inordinate focus upon the presence of pathologies in the media's operation in democratic systems. Once the illness is diagnosed, the inevitable and logical next step on the part of the attending physician is to prescribe some form of treatment which will, in this case, aid in the revival and sustenance of a public sphere commensurate with the normative *weltanschauung* of democracy. Whatever the merits of such an approach, it effectively confines discussion within a very restricted terrain that ultimately produces the theoretical vagueness that characterises the Habermasian literature. Despite assertions that "democracy cannot be reduced to issues of the media" (Dahlgren, 1995), the focus in the Habermasian literature upon the ability the media to provide the quality and quantity of public discussion believed indispensable to a thriving democracy would suggest that this is often the case. All too often, the actions and products of the media become the chief ways and means by which the buoyancy and vitality of the democratic process are evaluated.

Consequently, Habermasian studies of the media tend to get wrapped up in issues and concerns relating to this media-centric micro-discourse and thereby avoid consideration of the larger conceptual questions involved in the meta-discourse of which they are a part. That is, the mechanism of the media's proper functioning is examined and contested, while the understanding and definition of the overall role

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that they are supposed to play is generally accepted without query or detailed investigation. As a result, the assumptions that have a direct bearing and influence on the micro-discourse - i.e., the larger role and position of the media and their function in the political process - are left unexamined. The crucial by-product of such suppositions is that they conceive the media's role and influence in a distorted manner. The role of the media is effectively considered in isolation of the larger problems and challenges of democracy as if all the correct functioning of democracy requires is that the media furnish high quality information and opinion to the mass public who utilize them to fuel their own deliberations and consequent policy wishes. The Habermasian position on the role and function of the media places the media at the theoretical and practical centre of public communication as the central precipitant force and influence. In this regard, Keane's declaration that the media should be judged amongst the most important institutions in any society since "the courage and independence they display are always a register of the state of morale and vigour of other bodies, from schools, trade unions and churches to legislatures, governments and courts of justice" is emblematic of the theoretical perspective adopted by this literature (Keane, 1991, 193).

This conception is theoretically precarious for two reasons. The first problem is that it envisions the media's role solely in terms of the purveyance and production of information. If anything, this is a simple and outdated notion of the media that reflects the powerful and enduring influence of classical liberal theory, which conceives of *the press* primarily as a political medium with important functions within a liberal democracy (Curran et al, 1980, 288). However, in spite of the prevalence and magnetism of this view, usage of the 'serious function' as the barometer by which the performance of the media is appraised fails to adequately consider or contemplate much of what the media actually do and provide to the public most of the time: it is too *narrow* an understanding through which to convey the role and function of the media. The furnishing of information about social and

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political matters is, at best, only part of what the media do and only part of what their audience expects them to do: the media is a multi-service and product supplier of a variety of cultural goods and products in a number of different forms and formats such as books, magazines, newspapers, television shows, music, movies and much more. Even in the category of information the media carries *serious* social and political news alongside weather reports, sports and entertainment news, lottery results, *lifestyle* advice and astrological forecasting in both general and more specialized *packages*. Moreover, the *communication* conveyed by the media in these products is differentiated in terms of its tone, level and degree of information: an issue will be subject to differing degrees of analysis and coverage in popular forums like television talk shows, news programs versus the kind of coverage found in forums like *The New York Times*. Differing media products are addressed or targeted to what Habermas has referred to as different *partial publics* (see chapter five). The provision of the various forms and kinds of entertainment material by the media is not an indication of a desire or an attempt on the part of media producers to, consciously or unconsciously, subvert the proper functioning of democracy. Rather, it is a manifestation of a commercial operation pursuing the maximization of the various internal benefits that result from the supplying of goods that consumers are willing to pay for. Measuring the performance of the media solely as a consequence of the provision and production of information serves only to distort the resulting understanding of its political role and position. Such a framework over-values the overall importance and significance of social and political information to both the media-as-producers as well as the public-as-audience. Moreover, this perspective results in the designation of those products that do not meet the criteria of *information* as being either diversionary ephemera or examples of the erosion in the rational-critical nature of the public sphere. As well, it treats media products as an uniform entity in terms of content, tone and level of sophistication. In attempting to formulate a consistent and accurate understanding of the role of the media observers need to consider all aspects of what the media does, not just particular, selected

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components.

Secondly, the *information-oriented* conception of the media's role misconceives the larger context within which both the media and the citizenry function. The underlying assumption in this perspective is that the plentiful supply of high-quality information is the central precondition and component of effective citizen participation in the democratic process. The absence of such information is seen as being tantamount to the disenfranchisement of the citizenry, as well as being a condition in which a debilitating political apathy can be fostered. But what could the citizenry do if it did have access to high-quality information? Even if a way was discovered for making pure political discourse and policy information as exciting and enthralling as entertainment-oriented forms of discourse and narrative, the political consequences of such a development would be negligible. In the current social-political context and institutional structure such an outcome would not be indicative of an upswing in political participation and engagement as much as it would be evidence of a similar kind of appreciation being manifested by the mass public for the newly *minted* political discourse as is demonstrated for sporting events, infotainment and other forms of diversion. Ultimately the issue is not one of how many people listen or the kinds of information that they receive. Rather, it is a question of whether individuals have ways of acting on behalf of what is being advocated (Mann, 1990, 89). Public life in representative democracy does not amount to the making of arguments, by both citizenry and state officials, reported in - if not *magnified* by - the media, that are aimed at shaping and influencing the course of debate about public policy. The media are not the vehicles or instruments through which the public participates in or directly influences the political process in some manner. Nor is deliberation, debate or discussion the central act of political communication undertaken by the citizenry to convey their wishes to those in government. Instead, the main institutional device by which the citizenry *communicate* to *established power* is that of the electoral ballot. In the institutional

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context of representative democracy, politics is not the ***direct business*** of the citizenry. Their role is one of choosing those officials who will deliberate about policy and then go about implementing their decisions. As such, it is not absolutely necessary that the citizenry have access to an "institutionally guaranteed forum in which to express their opinions and to question established power" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, 10).

The protracted struggle in the western world for *freedom of the press* yielded a variety of sophisticated and innovative arguments about the role of the press, the limits of state censorship and freedom of expression. A common hallmark of Habermasian arguments is their placement of the press at the centre of the maintenance and sustenance of democratic practice. In a public sphere apparently dominated and shaped by the media, or at least one that is frequently characterised as being so, it is not altogether incomprehensible that observers come to see the media as the focal point of a desire for the "good" society, as the institutional site where popular political will should take form and citizens should be able to constitute themselves as active agents in the political process (Dahlgren, 1991, 2). By this kind of reckoning, the manner in which the public sphere either meets or fails such expectations is taken to be a concrete measurement of the democratic character of a society.

However, the media do not constitute the totality of discursive institutions or deliberative spaces available within the public sphere. There also exists a number of other institutions and realms that provide particular and localized discursive spaces for individuals to exchange views and opinions about a wide range of social and political matters. These arenas of public discourse arise within various concrete institutional settings, within schools, work places, residential committees, political organizations, juries, voluntary associations, political parties and so on (Mann, 1990, 87). More than anything else these are the sites in which the possibility and reality

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of concrete dialogue, deliberation and political participation can occur. The dominance of the media-centric focus within the Habermasian literature, which sees the media as the central site in which the citizenry can express their opinion and contest the policies of State, has meant that the particular, localized political and social sites and arenas which make up the State have been ignored. Yet, these arenas are the primary sites for political discourse: as compared to the media, they are far more accessible and penetrable, at an every day and practical level, by individual citizens. Moreover, it is within these spaces, as opposed to that of the media, that the citizenry *does* participate in various forms of political activity and discussion.

The Habermasian positioning of the media as the proverbial *ground zero* of political practice has the consequence of misrepresenting the shape and reality of representative government. The theoretical construction of the media as an instrument of *transformation* overlooks and downplays the extent to which political communication arrangements and participatory practices follow the contours of and derive their resources from the society of which they are a part (Gurevitch & Blumer, 1990, 272). While the media can play an active role in the promotion of certain values, bringing about or hindering changes, the impetus that decides what role they will play, and what process they will promote, comes from outside the media system. The media's effectiveness in moulding changes is also largely decided by external factors. The political process is a major, and perhaps even ***the*** dominant, macro-structural determinant of the media's role. Whether the media are privately or publicly owned does not alter the fact that they, whatever their form or products, do not exhaust the totality of avenues for political participation. Although the media play an important part in the process of political communication they are not the definitive or only arenas in which the cultural resources for effective citizenship are constructed and maintained. Moreover, neither the shape nor the character of the media are generated autochthonously. The media function in a political context - in most instances some form of representative democracy - in which communication

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about public issues takes place in a number of forums and in a variety of ways. In this context, it is the nature of the state, more than the media or any other non-governmental institutions, that gives a particular shape or direction to the character of institutions within the public sphere. Indeed, the very configuration and direction of the public sphere itself is heavily determined by the environment engendered by the rules, practices and institutions of the state. However, within the Habermas inspired literature, conceptualisations of the media have become increasingly detached from the practices and procedures of the political environment within which they are theoretically and actually situated. Instead, these conceptions tend to focus solely upon the workings and orientation of the media as the central forum for and influence upon the public life of democracy.

Nevertheless, it is the institutional structure of representative government that gives the relationship between the elected and the electorate its particular shape (Manin, 1997, 183). It is a relationship in which each country's particular constellation of state-controlled legislative and electoral institutions, laws and traditions provides the framework for a different pattern in its corresponding *public sphere* (Schudson, 1997, 313). In spite of their differing histories and differing configurations of communicative and political practices, each representative democracy shares, at a general level, a number of common features and overarching principles: those who govern are appointed by regularly held elections; the relative independence of the decision-making of those who govern from the wishes of their electorate; freedom of expression of opinion and political views amongst those who are governed; public decisions undergo the trial of debate (Manin, 1997). These institutions and practices of government, whatever their particular manifestation and form, are a central and commanding site for public deliberation on public issues. While institutions of the public sphere, like the media, can certainly influence the character of traditional political institutions, they do not stand prior to or invariably opposed to state institutions. Thus, what needs to be acknowledged and recognized

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is the extent to which democracy, as both an ideal and an institutional structure, and the media mutually constitute one another. Any political role that the media are to have cannot be defined in opposition to or in isolation from the *de facto* structure of government, however it may be constituted.

An accurate understanding of the political role of the media requires that the democratic process they operate within is properly deciphered and comprehended. In this regard, democracy is best understood as being a method of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the citizenry exercise some form of control as opposed to being the embodiment of a set of ideas, values or normative beliefs. Democracy is a form of government based on the principle of majority rule - albeit an informed majority - rather than the values or ideas of *liberty, equality* or *fraternity*. While such things might be preconditions for democracy or may even be facilitated by it, they should not be seen as being definitions of what democracy is (McLean, 1989, 32). Laws and policies are not created by the overriding *raison d'etre*, ideals or principles behind the process and institutions of governance. In representative democracies the source of laws and policies is a collection of officeholders (working in tandem with an institutionalized bureaucracy of experts, administrators and assistants) who have attained office by winning contested elections (Kateb, 1981, 357). Accordingly, the primary influence that citizens exercise over the course of public policy is not exerted through a process of discourse and negotiation with these officials. It is exercised through the casting of ballots in regular and recurring elections. Moreover, the influence of the citizenry over the course of public policy is conferred to those passing retrospective judgement on the actions of their representatives, not, as is sometimes asserted, to those citizens expressing *ex ante* their wishes regarding actions to be undertaken (Manin, 1997, 183)(3). By their very nature, contested elections allow the citizenry to judge, *ex post facto*, the policies and actions of the governing officials. This, in turn, provides contesting officials with some general guidance concerning the public opinion and

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its preferences on laws and policies that have been and might be enacted (Kateb, ***Op. Cit.***). Thus, for the general public the fundamental institution of participation is the electoral system: while more specialized *partial publics* can and do insinuate themselves into the discussion and design of government policies, this is not the primary mode of citizen involvement and interaction with the State . This is the state of affairs which begets and shapes the communicative context and environment between the elected and the electorate.

Given the diverse and divergent interpretations that democracy, as a concept, has borne, envisioning it as a set of concrete institutional arrangements attenuates the sense of ambiguity that all too often encompasses it. However, such a definition does not completely remove the enigmatic aura that surrounds the concept. Originally employed to describe the government of Athens, democracy has also come to refer to representative forms of government - forms of government that were initially seen and characterized by their proponents as being radically different from the Athenian example in that government was the direct responsibility of a set of representatives as opposed to the entire citizen body (Manin, 1997). While both forms claim a common conceptual bearing, they appear to offer fundamentally different *theories* on the extent to which members of the collectivity should exercise control over the process of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies as well as the institutional means by which popular control and equality should be realized (Beetham, 1993, 55). In spite of their shared nomenclature, the direct and representative forms of democracy entail considerably different things in terms of their practices and institutions. As a result, given that it can apparently apply to theoretical and concrete institutions that are so manifestly different and distinct, a residual uncertainty hovers about what is meant by democracy or "rule of the people". That is, there is an underlying tension in how the principles and practices of representative government (where most citizens are effectively removed from productive debate and resolution of the issues that impact upon their everyday lives)

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relate to the "classic" definition and manifestation of democracy (where the entire citizenry is actively involved in the processes and institutions of self-rule) (Rucinski, 1991, 184). This tension plays itself out in Habermasian discussions of the role of the media in that they are positioned as the instruments by which the tension between direct and representational forms of democracy *will* and *can* be circumnavigated.

If anything, this circumstance reflects a latent disaccord between contemporary theories of communication and theories and practices of democratic politics. Although the ideal exemplars of deliberation are based on face-to-face situations such as the Athenian *agora*, New England town halls, or legislative bodies, the likelihood of realistically achieving such a form of deliberation in large complex nation states with millions of citizens is generally conceded to be next to impossible. In such circumstances, the choice is between drastically decentralizing deliberation by carrying it out in many separate small groups of citizens (Page, 1996, 4), or adapting politics to large-scale societies through institutions of representation: political parties, elected representatives and full-time bureaucratic apparatuses (Garnham, 1992, 366). In practice, the general tendency has been to adapt democratic practice through the introduction of representative structures. For advocates of direct democracy such a manoeuvre has always been viewed as suspect and an abjuration of authentic democratic expression and practice. Nevertheless, whatever the alienation and peril involved in their operation, the establishment of representative structures of government offer, as Nicholas Garnham notes, "a liberating gain rather than any sort of loss of supposed preexisting authenticity (***Ibid.***)." However, understandings of the operation of the media have remained enmeshed within the paradigm of the direct individual face-to-face communication (***Op. Cit.***, 367). The spectre of the Athenian agora, which has frequently haunted discussions of the practice and theory of democracy, is especially prevalent in current discussions about the developments in media and communications technology that have occurred in the last decade:

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> Interactive telecommunications technology makes it possible to revive, in a sophisticated modern form, some of the essential characteristics of the ancient world's first democratic polities. Instead of a show of hands, we have electronic polls. Instead of a single meeting place, we have far-flung, interactive telecommunications networks that extend for thousands of miles. In place of personal discussion and deliberation, we have call-ins, talk shows, faxes, and on-line computer bulletin boards (Grossman, 1995, 48).

By the same token, a common assertion found in the literature is that recent developments in communications technology provide the technological conditions for the establishment of "democracy as a cybernetic social system of networks in which there are many autonomous and decentralized nodes of power and information with their own multiple channels of communication (Tehranian, 1990, 6)." A less formal wording of this lofty vision heralds the emergence of an "electronic republic" where "citizens not only will be able to select those who govern them, as they always have, but increasingly they also will be able to participate directly in making the laws and policies by which they are governed (Grossman, 1995, 4)."

The lack of synchronicity between notions of communication and the institutions and practices of politics in the Habermasian literature has resulted in a tendency to misread and misconstrue representative government as a form and embodiment of democracy. Frequently, following the arguments and categories advanced by Barber in Strong Democracy, representation has been characterized as *thin democracy* and found wanting as a form of democratic politics. The Habermasian position generally cites a number of trends and factors as evidence of representative democracy's theoretical and empirical malaise: an active alienation from political life that is exhibited in low voter turn-outs, disengagement from political parties, declining levels of political knowledge and minimal participation, interest and trust in the political system. While this situation is attributed, in part, to a number of social and historical developments, critics also point to the *restricted*

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nature of the role envisioned and allowed for the citizen in the theory and practice of representative government. "Representation", Barber argues, "is incompatible with freedom because it delegates and thus alienates political will at the cost of genuine self-government and autonomy (Barber, 1984, 145)." For this perspective, citizen participation in democracy implies more than voting and a few other minimal acts. In such a system rule of the people by the people becomes a meaningless slogan (Rucinski, 1991, 185). Politics is seen to turn into an impoverished realm of activity carried out largely by an elite of specialists and experts with a considerable degree of independence from the wishes of their electorate and constituents. Politics is what politicians do, but beyond voting citizens have no clearly defined role. For participatory democrats democracy is conceptualized as a process of interactive decision-making in which *communication* between and amongst the elected and their constituents is an essential component.

Underlying the most basic expectations in the Habermasian literature in regard to what the media should do is the belief that a population truly constitutes itself as a public through a process of communication: "Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion - that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions - about matters of general interest (Habermas, 1974, 136)." This process of communication, often characterized as the "public life on which democracy depends", is thought of as being more than just the sheer technical ability of governments to send and receive messages to and from a diverse and dispersed population. In a democracy, public life and its associated form of communication is seen as being a shared and reciprocal experience. As such, the media's prescribed political goal is to simulate a form of political practice of spatial and temporal ubiquitousness that their introduction cannot but help to transform and significantly alter. But the conscription of the media in the sustainment of a model of politics based on the *agora*, town hall or legislature involves much more than the replication

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of a determinate spatial unity. More than this, this kind of conception sees the role of the media as being one of forging individual citizens as participants in a particular mode of discussion (Miller, 1993, 135). The formation of a public sphere appropriate and essential to democracy requires that public deliberation be of a rational-critical nature. Habermas has argued that there are three decisive elements entailed in the democratic justification of political authority (Habermas, 1989b). First, it is necessary that discussants assume the rationality of every other participant. Secondly, "it is only in the light of such *assumptions* of rationality that one can grasp the function and meaning of rules of parliamentary procedure." Further, practical discourses are concerned with "the universalizability of interests" (***Op. Cit.***, 138). Finally, the formation of "public will" involves compromise, albeit a compromise that might be discursively evaluated by the participants as to whether or not they "have come about under fair conditions (***Ibid.***)." Collectively, these elements constitute the ideal archetype of an "all-inclusive body of enlightened citizens reasoning together" that informs and permeates the expectations attached to the role of the media (Rosen, 1991, 270).

The Habermasian misreading of representative democracy stems from an interpretation of *government of the people* as the direct expression of the will of the citizenry. A *governing people* is seen as residing, in the eyes of Barber and other proponents of participatory or *strong democracy*, in the direct participation of the people in the role and act of governing. For example, Kellner postulates that "genuine democracy" requires individuals who, minimally, are informed about the political issues and process in their nation and, maximally, participate in public debate and decision-making (Kellner, 1992, 100). In the Habermasian literature, citizens are positioned, albeit in ideal terms, as primarily discursive and deliberative agents who actively take part in an ongoing discussion about public matters. An *authentic public sphere* is characterized as one in which every citizen acts as a gatherer of facts and exponent of opinion - each individual functions as a fully

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fledged participant in a realm of discourse and negotiation (Peters & Cmiel, 1991, 212). However, at a theoretical as well as practical level, such a vision of the role of the citizen fails to take into account the reality of the institutional space within which the citizenry function. Both the institutions of state and the public sphere are enclosed within a legal framework that allows for public access and a relative degree of transparency. But, in addition to this, both are simultaneously supported by elements of legality and practicality which constrain direct public participation (Rodger, 1985, 216). The institutional space of both the public sphere and representative government do not operate as if they were an extension of a face-to-face discussion: in each instance, there exists a limited number of individuals who are active participants in any *deliberation* that may occur in either the realm of the state or the public sphere, while the remainder of the public act as spectators with a limited degree of contact and interaction with this first group. The form that this interaction takes is rarely that of discourse and negotiation.

The imaginative antecedents of contemporary theories of *strong democracy* or an abundantly active and participatory self-governing community lie in ancient conceptions of political theory: in an understanding of what Benjamin Constant called, in contrast to modern liberty, "ancient liberty" (Constant, 1988: see especially pages 309 - 328). However, Constant argued that besides the significant differences that exist between the two conceptions of liberty at the practical level, there is also an overlooked, unbridgeable gap present at the conceptual level. Constant depicts the city states of classical Greek and Roman antiquity as being relatively small communities that were "driven by necessity against one another": each republic had to "buy their security, their independence, their whole existence at the price of war (***Op. Cit.***, 312)." As a consequence of this "way of being", all these states utilized a system of slavery in which slaves did much of the essential work so that the citizenry could therefore devote all their time and energies to public service and military life. Moreover, it was also the case in these communities that the private

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actions of the citizenry were subject to a "severe" and constant surveillance by the political authority and of the community as a whole: "No importance was given to individual independence, neither in relation to opinions, nor to labour, nor, above all, to religion (***Op. Cit.***, 311)." While citizens were "almost always" sovereign in public affairs, they were quite restricted in terms of the exercise of their faculties and in their individual choices. As part of the collective body, an individual might interrogate, dismiss, condemn, exile or sentence to death his magistrates and superiors; as a subject of this same collective body an individual could himself be deprived of his status, stripped of his privileges, banished, put to death by the discretionary will of the whole to which he belonged (***Op. Cit.***, 312). The key characteristic of the liberty of the ancients for Constant was that it involved an active and constant participation in the exercise of collective power. There was no other site for liberty to be realized but within the geographic and institutional confines of the state: liberty outside the boundaries and space of the state was inconceivable. For the ancients, in Constant's view, the state, in both theoretical and practical terms, was designed so that liberty could be durably maintained against both internal and external threat, thereby guaranteeing the liberty of the citizenry. The enjoyment of liberty was provided both by and through membership in the political community.

As compared to ancient city states, Constant depicted modern political communities as being much larger in terms of their territory and population. In addition, "thanks to commerce, religion, to the moral and intellectual progress of the human race", slavery has been abolished and, consequently, all individuals must devote their energies to the production of material wealth and the satisfaction of their collective and individual needs: "Free men must exercise all professions, provide for all the needs of society (***Op. Cit.***, 314)." With the increase in the population and territorial size and the decrease in leisure time, individuals had little opportunity or time to engage in political activities on a full-time basis: "the constant exercise of political rights, the daily discussion of the affairs of the state, disagreements,

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confabulations, the whole entourage and movement of factions, necessary agitations, the compulsory filling, if I may use the term, of the life of the peoples of antiquity who, without this resource would have languished under the weight of painful inaction, would only cause trouble and fatigue to modern nations, where each individual, occupied with his speculations, his enterprises, the pleasures he obtains or hopes for, does not wish to be distracted from them other than momentarily, and as little as possible (***Op. Cit.***, 314 - 315)." As a result, modern individuals do not enjoy the same degree of civic and political participation as their ancient counterparts. Indeed, as Constant notes the sovereignty of the contemporary citizen is "restricted and almost always suspended": it is exercised at fixed and rare intervals, and then only so that individuals may renounce it (***Op. Cit.***, 312). However, unlike the ancients, the modern individual is independent in their private life in terms of their personal choices and the exercise of their faculties: they are not subject to the same kind of invasive and pervasive intervention and control by a common social and political authority. In contrast to the liberty of the ancients, Constant believed that the imaginative focus and meaning of modern liberty was primarily a right to private enjoyments. This right was secured by the capacity to delegate tasks through the division of economic and political labour rather than by the extension of civic and political participation. In ancient states, the more time and energy that an individual dedicates to the exercise of their political rights, the freer he thought himself; on the other hand, in the kind of liberty of which Constant believes we are capable, the more the exercise of political rights leaves us the time for our private interests, the more precious liberty will be to us (***Op. Cit.***, 325). The location of liberty has shifted from the political sphere to that of the civil or individual realm. This is a critical component of the *liberating gain* that the institutions of representation grant the individual citizen and the community to which they belong.

Representative government does not confer an institutional role to the

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assembled people, nor does it make politics their *direct* business. Instead, the public chooses a set of individuals who will deliberate about policy and go about implementing the subsequent decisions that arise from this process of discussion. Representative democracy is much more government by the consent of the governed than it is a form of government striving to directly embody the will of the people (Plamenatz, 1973, 108). It is not a form of government in which the community directly governs itself. Instead, it is a system in which public policies and decisions are made subject to the verdict of the people by means of periodic and recurrent elections. Thus, elections are the key act of and forum for citizen participation in a representative system. If being politically active means taking part in government, citizens are not very politically active in a representative democracy: but, if it means taking part in activities that are conceived as a means of influencing those who govern, citizens can be, if they so desire, highly active politically (***Op. Cit.***, 86). Although government is in the hands of an elite, it is an 'elite' that is selected by the citizenry: likewise, the mandate of this 'elite' to maintain possession of the power of government is contingent upon the verdict of the population over whom they govern.

In effect, the institutional space of representative government creates two distinctive though inter-related spheres of action: the political and the non-political(4). This is an aspect of contemporary democratic practice that is all too often overlooked in the literature concerned with the relationship between the media and democracy. The shift in democratic practice from a direct to representative model alters and changes the nature of political deliberation (Elster, 1998, 2). As an institutional and theoretical framework, representative government is, in the name of democracy, an ambitious attempt to give the public a *voice* in government while also dealing with and accounting for the complexity and logistics involved in nation-states with large, heterogeneous, geographically dispersed populations. To this end, the institutional structure of representative government effects a division of labour in political expertise, policy making and communication (Page, 1996, 5). The idea is

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that legislators, other public officials and *partial publics* interested in the promotion and creation of specific kinds of policies will specialize in policymaking and learn a lot about it (***Ibid.***): the majority of, if not all, the deliberation and decision-making about matters of public importance will be conducted by elected representatives, selected experts and state bureaucrats. In performing this role, representatives are active continually within a fairly well-defined realm of action. To varying degrees, depending on the particular institutional configuration of their country, representatives deliberate with fellow officials about the nature and content of government policy, make decisions about its particular direction and form, and go about implementing the subsequent end-product of this process.

The institutional space and practices of representative democracy engenders a novel conception of citizenship: citizens are viewed primarily as the source of political legitimacy, rather than as persons who might desire to hold offices themselves (Manin, 1997, 92). Consequently, the role of the citizen is largely confined to giving periodical renewal of the mandate to govern (or, on occasion, the dismissal of the mandate to govern of one party and its bestowal on a competing political party) (Parry, 1989, 491). Their political role is substantially different from that of elected representatives and other government officials in that the realm of political action within which they act is relatively under-defined and open-ended. Outside of voting at regular intervals for those who will make decisions about policy issues, the citizen takes few political decisions. It is not their responsibility or obligation to make either law or policy if they so choose: participation and involvement in the process of policy creation is something that an individual decides to become involved in as a consequence of their particular interests and desires. Instead, the mere citizen in a large democracy votes for the candidate most likely to champion the policies they favour to look after the interest of the groups they belong to or are concerned about or the one best suited (in their opinion) to carry out the duties that are entrusted to whoever wins the election (Plamenatz, 1973, 175).

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Besides voting, the citizenry also has the right to form and express opinions outside the control of the government. Freedom of opinion ensures that the public can express their wishes and, through the vehicle of the media, have a forum in which these claims and demands may be brought to the attention of both those who govern and other citizens. The public expression of these wishes provide representatives with a sense of the mood and inclinations of the public. However, the final decision as to whether they act on or ignore the wishes of people belongs to the representatives alone. It is in the interest of the representatives, especially if they want to continue in office, to pay attention to the opinions about policies expressed by the public. As well, citizens can, if they so choose, participate in political parties or other social-political organizations. While voting is the one defined task and function that citizens perform, it does not constitute the limit or horizon within which they must act. Other options of political participation and involvement are available to them, if they choose to pursue them.

In these kinds of circumstances, the individual voter does not require the same kind or amount of information or process of deliberation that is necessary for the representative to competently perform their duties. The voter undertakes a different kind of decision-making than that which is assumed by the expert or elected official: the criteria of understanding and rationality at work in either decision are of an entirely different order and make-up (Plamenatz, 1973, 193). When voting, individuals are not required to utilize a strict or uniform set of criteria by which to choose a representative from amongst the various candidates. Nor is there any legal requirement that voters employ a certain set of criteria when making such a selection. Any sense of criteria on which voters should base their decisions function solely as conventions and common sense suggestions: the degree to which an individual chooses to apply such standards is strictly one of individual and personal choice - there is nothing that forces voters to be rational or fair when at the ballot box. Citizens may decide to vote for whomever meets some general and abstract criteria

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(political orientation, policy platform, competence, honesty), but they may also decide to elect someone just because they like this individual better than another or on the basis of media presentation, natural endowments or other such "foolish" or irrational reasons (Manin, 1997, 136, 138).

This is the product of the freedom of choice that electors have in casting their ballots: it is up to the individual, and the individual alone, to decide the basis upon one candidate is chosen over another. While voters may decide to vote for one candidate for 'foolish' or irrational reasons, the recurrent character of elections provides the electorate with a learning curve in regard to the yardsticks they use when selecting a representative. That is, voters will discover from experience that the fallacious criteria they employed at a previous election led to government which turned out to be extremely bad or incompetent, and they can alter these criteria at the next election (***Op. Cit.***, 1997, 146). Through their repetition, elections allow voters the opportunity to evaluate the value and reliability of their criteria for representative selection. Nevertheless, that some individuals employ irrational or ill-informed reasons when electing a representative does not necessarily mean that corresponding electoral results are in some way *compromised* or less valid than they should be(**5**). In part, this is because of the inherent difficulty in ascribing a specific uniform meaning to the collective vote made for or against a particular candidate or party. Moreover, it is doubtful that all the people voting in an election cast their ballots for the same reasons, with the same intensity of priorities, or with similar expectations and beliefs about what the prospective government will or should do.

However, the crucial point in all this is that the kind of decision that the individual citizen makes as well as the realm of political activity they act within are ***very*** different, in terms of their scope and reach, from that of the elected politician and government bureaucrat. Likewise, in a representative democracy the kind of political decisions taken by the citizenry are not at all comparable to those that they

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would undertake in a system of direct democracy. That is to say, it is not required of the citizenry that they decide on the specifics of policy and the details of its implementation, if they so choose. As mentioned previously, the individual voter votes for one party or one candidate rather than another: it is the task of the party or candidate who wins to take a variety of decisions on matters that individual voters may have strong preferences and desires or which they may not know anything about or have a specific position or inclination. Be this as it may, the nature of the citizen's role does not preclude an individual from taking a greater interest in public affairs. Individuals are neither prevented nor discouraged from becoming more informed about matters of public policy or the workings of government. A viable democracy, representative or otherwise, presupposes an engaged citizenry: Plamenatz noted that the survival of democracy, a system in which the supreme makers of law and policy are politically responsible to the people, requires that information and wisdom should be fairly widely distributed (Plamenatz, 1973, 200). On the other hand, the option of becoming such an "engaged" political actor is left entirely to the discretion of the individual citizen: individuals enjoy the freedom to define for themselves their stance toward the political system, including the right to be politically apathetic (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, 271). Accordingly, however individuals choose to act in their capacity as citizens, the information that they will require to (minimally) perform their tasks, the type of discussions that they will have, and the kind of decisions they will make will be of a much different order than equivalent requirements, deliberations and decisions undertaken by the elected officials. This is not to say that there are two stores of politically relevant information: a larger, more comprehensive one shared by those who act as representatives and a much smaller, superficial one shared by the citizenry (Plamenatz, 1973, 178). In a democratic system, representatives will be, as a consequence of their responsibilities and the nature of their role, both more informed and more active than the citizenry. But, the pool of information that either representative or citizen draws from is a shared, common one: differences in their mutual level of informed-ness is a function of individual

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inclination and/or the type of function that they perform within the institutional structure. More than a notion of a rational-critical public sphere, this is the theoretical and practical context in which the role of the media should be situated and understood.

Although the institutions and practices of representative democracy designate different activities and roles to representatives and citizens, this has been neglected in discussions of the role of the media. As a result of the universalistic nature of Habermas's conception of the public sphere, in that it stresses the public sphere's role in connecting the public, as a body, to the official state, analyses of the public sphere have tended to gloss over the existence of different roles and realms of political action. The central problem with this vision of the public sphere is its failure to adequately conceptualize the inter-related spheres of political action and communication that emerge as a result of the institutional matrix of representative democracy. In regards to the media, there are two pivotal aspects that this vision of public life under-theorizes or misconceives. First, as discussed above, it treats the roles of politician and citizen as if they involve the same kinds of activities and decisions. Citizens can, as Keane asserts, engage in controversies over who should get what, when and how as well as try to redefine the world (Keane, 1998, 241). But, it is not the case that the forum in which each citizen debates these matters is the same in terms of its import, influence and power to act upon such impulses. Nor is the case that the decisions individuals will have to make or are expected to make are the same in terms of their reach and consequence. Understanding the public sphere as an "institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" that is a site for "the production and circulation of discourses critical that can in principle be critical of the state" ignores the extent to which very different roles, realms of action and tasks exist in the public sphere (Fraser, 1992, 110). Within any public sphere, there exist two sorts of roles: those who formulate the public discourse and those who utilize and consume it (Mann, 1990, 88). Although there may be some overlap between these

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two categories of people, in practical as well as theoretical terms each remains distinct and separate from the other.

Secondly, Habermas's universalistic conception of the public sphere places a unified face on a multiplicity of networked spaces of communication that are not tied immediately to territory and which irreversibly fragment anything resembling a single, spatially integrated public sphere (Keane, 1998, 240). In their everyday lives, individuals are presented with a number of venues of and avenues for public discourse both within and outside the realm of the media. The public sphere is made up of a number of intermediary institutions and organizations that vary in terms of their practical and thematic accessibility to the public. All of these intermediary structures are relatively porous to one another without being inclined towards becoming an integrated public sphere. However, while each of these intermediary structures and "partial publics" are porous to one another, each is subject to distinct processes and practices with correspondingly different forms of interaction and relationships. A discussion between a group of people in a face-to-face situation will be markedly different from the interaction and relationship that a spatially and temporally dispersed audience of media product will have. While the different networked spaces of communication are differentiated according to "functional specifications, thematic foci, policy fields, and so forth", they are still accessible to lay-persons (Habermas, 1996, 373). Yet the kind of accessibility that a "lay-person" might have is determined in part by the density and type of communication that takes place. In some instances the accessibility will be of a participatory and interactive nature, while in other cases there will be a sharp degree of separation between the limited set of individuals who are producing and controlling the discourse and the larger number of individuals who, for a variety of reasons and objectives, are utilizing and consuming this discourse.

The media are perhaps the most familiar of public sphere institutions, but they

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are still just one of the avenues and forums available for public discourse. Unlike the more particular and localized discursive spaces in which individuals can exchange views and opinions (that exist within various concrete institutional settings, within schools, work places, residential committees, political organizations, juries, voluntary associations, political parties and so on), the discursive space established by the media is largely *abstract* and *representational* in character. While the scattered audience of either a newspaper, radio or television program can discuss amongst themselves what they see, hear, or read, the resulting conversation lacks a central place of assembly or sense of shared collectiveness. Additionally, the communication that occurs between the producers and consumers of a media product is asymmetrical in that it is largely non-dialogical and non-interactive. In their interaction, the producers and recipients of media products are generally not engaged in a dialogue with one another (Thompson, 1995, 246). Media products are usually produced for an indefinite and unspecified number of potential recipients: in producing their particular product producers do not know in advance the exact composition, inclination or size of the potential audience. Yet, as discussed previously, these products are quite differentiated in terms of the content that they convey and the audiences that they target: the discussion that a public issue receives on a television talk show like *The Tonight Show* and in *The New York Times* will be very different in terms of their tone and level of analytical and informational sophistication. As well, recipients receive these products without the possessing the ability to respond, in any direct or discursive manner, to the producers (***Ibid.***). A media product, produced by a small group of professionals, is conveyed, in whatever format or fashion, to a larger group of recipients who have no direct way of responding to its content beyond the choice/act of either buying and consuming said product or not doing so. Beyond a few self-selecting individuals who will utilize another form of communication (a letter or a telephone call) to offer their opinion of the respective merits of the product, most people will participate only as recipients and consumers of media products.

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This, in turn, touches upon an important consideration that is frequently overlooked in Habermasian discussions of the media's *political* role. The media exist as entities that simultaneously straddle both the private and public spheres with corresponding and often conflicting obligations and responsibilities in each realm. As private associations the media's primary objective is not the sustenance or furtherance of one or another *vision of democracy*, but rather the selling and purveyance of goods: the media sells the public particular goods and products, not visions or ideals. Like any other commercial entity, the media attempt to sell a product that matches and appeals to the tastes and preferences of its customers. Consequently, the resulting media-scape is not so much a reflection of the relative health of democracy or evidence of support for one *conception* of what democracy should be, as it is an indication of the diverse appetites of the public for various kinds of media *goods*. But, in both popular and academic circles, there also exists the notion that the media have or should have a special kind of relationship with both the public and private spheres, above and beyond that which is possessed by other commercial producers. This is the result of a perception and belief that the media play a key role in facilitating the communication between and amongst politicians and the larger public. Indeed, the notion that the media can be held accountable for what they do, or fail to do, in terms of the wider and longer term benefit of society has frequently been invited by the media themselves (McQuail, 1994, 241 - 242). For example, because of some of the products that they offer to the public, like the information about local, national and international events and occurrences known as the *news*, the media claim, if not expect, some special rights and privileges as a consequence of their provision of these *goods*. This is because the provision of these particular products is seen to constitute the exercising of a significant public role. Furthermore, these informational goods are advertised and sold to consumers as providing *information* that they, as both private individuals and public citizens, will need in order to make a variety of economic, social and political decisions that have varying degrees of short- and long-term consequence upon and import for their

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everyday lives.

Such being the case, a participatory and reciprocal form of communication is neither the goal nor the central form of the discursive interaction to be established through and by the media. In transmitting various messages, ideas and images the media provides a central location for its dispersed audience to both access and register its content. The civic and emancipatory character of the media, in relation to the public sphere, lie in their ability to constitute and distinguish a community to itself: they create a collective image of the collective whole despite the de-spatialized nature of this community. In these circumstances, the role of the media is one of publishing or *publicizing* information and opinion: the public and community are created through the transcendence of geographic space and distance rather than in a reciprocal discussion or deliberation. In reading newspapers, listening to the radio, or watching television the public reads about itself, hears about itself, sees itself and consequently discovers ways to come into existence (Peters, 1995, 16). The public sphere constituted through the media gathers together the dispersed individuals of nation states and, as Arendt observed, prevents their falling over each other (Arendt, 1958, 52).

Given these circumstances, the media need to be seen less as an agent by which the active creation and sustainment of a communal sentiment or feeling is cultivated among all participants, and more as a means of civic representation and self-reflection. Instead of being a corruption of democracy and a defilement of rational communication, the altered, augmented form of political communication (be through the medium of print or electronic transmission) reflects the reality of the expanded territorial nature of industrial society. Before the advent of the media public life consisted of those public spaces and buildings where people could meet for a variety of purposes - relaxation, pleasure or self-improvement. Those public events that did take place were at a particular place for a particular audience: a

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concert hall, political lecture, sporting event, church or civic or state ceremony were open to those who could get there and afford (where necessary) the price of entry (Scannell, 1989, 140). Through the agency of the various technologies of mass communication *public* events acquire an audience far larger than those who could be immediately present. At the same time, the *intervention* of the media transforms what had previously been understood as being *public* by taking already public events and making them even more public (Meyrowitz, 1985, 287). The intercession of electronic media, like television, increases the number of witnesses, regardless of whether they were at the actual location of said incident or in a locale spatially removed from the original place. Furthermore, in doing this the media provides a new kind of access to virtually the whole spectrum of public life: political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainments are placed in a common domain, open and accessible to all (Scannell, 1989, 140). Public life was, in effect, opened by the intercession of the media. The backdrop of day-to-day life now incorporates a whole stratum of events and information that were previously unavailable to a large proportion of the population. The public is presented with a symbolic representation by which to gain a sense of itself as a *people* or *public* in lieu of the, logistically impossible, physical assembly of the entire populace.

Within the Habermasian literature the nature of the communicative and spatial relationships associated with the media have been misconceived and misconstrued. As discussed in previous chapters, the form of communication ascribed to the media as being the ideal that they should replicate and sustain has been one that is largely dialogical in its reach and scope. That is, it is premised on the understanding that individuals, in one way or another, come together in a shared locale and engage in dialogue with one another as equal partners in a face-to-face conversation (Thompson, 1993, 186). In the case of the media the belief is that two or more people are connected by a certain means of communication - television, radio, satellite, fax, e-mail - in which non-violent disputes erupt, for a brief or more

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extended period of time, concerning the power relations operating within their given milieu of interaction and/or the wider milieu of the social and political world within which the disputants are situated (Keane, 1998, 241).

This kind of understanding sees the media as being a means by which to extend and expand the discussion that takes place in the context a face-to-face situation: as such, it posits a relatively harmonious continuity and conformity between conversation and media products. For example, in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere Habermas asserts that the close connection between the emerging periodical press and various centres of sociability (salons, clubs and coffeehouses) was a key facilitator in the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere. In this public sphere, Habermas argues that there was a close, interwoven connection between the contemporaneous periodicals and journals and the life of and discussion taking place within the coffeehouses and salons. Habermas believes that the use of the dialogue form in many of the articles attests to their proximity to the spoken word: "One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to reenter, via reading, the original conversational medium (Habermas, 1989a, 42)." This link between text and discussion is a central component of Habermas's understanding of the bourgeois public sphere. It is an aspect that Habermas unmistakably emphasizes when discussing the connection between the periodical press and the numerous coffeehouses that emerged simultaneously: "The periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week published a selection (Habermas, 1989a, 42)." For Habermas, the purpose of the newspaper was not only to inform and make things public but, more importantly, it was to function as a part of and aid to public discussion.

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But such a degree of unity between print and conversation is only really possible and feasible in small-scale situations like the New England town hall or the Athenian *agora*. In large scale circumstances like that of contemporary - or even nineteenth century - nation states, the continuity and conformity between talking and writing is not as harmonious nor as workable as Habermas would appear to assume. Moreover, the dialogical model of communication is based on certain conditions that, given the complexities, circumstances and logistics involved in both modern media and nation states, are increasingly remote from the actual circumstances of public discourse. It is not just simply a case of practical obstacles that need to be overcome. At a theoretical level, the question of scale makes both participation and mediation issues that need to be dealt with and incorporated into any assessment of the political role of the media. The role of mediated communication cannot be interpreted as an extended form of face-to-face communication: the forms of publicness and communication that it engenders are de-spatialized, non-dialogical and representational in character. Accordingly, it may be far more productive to view the media as a medium of civic representation and self-reflection rather than as a forum through which the citizenry participates in a large-scale, rational-critical discussion on matters of public policy. The media should be seen less as an agent of direct democratic discussion and more as a technology of publicity by which ideas, information and images are placed before the public.

The extension and generalization of public discourse through the media - print or electronic - does not and cannot replicate the dynamics and symbolic exchange that characterizes small-group interaction. Contrary to Habermas's belief, few individuals can re-enter, via reading (or viewing) "the original conversational medium" as participants. The media do not operate so as to extend and expand the realm and reach of a *central* and *common* dialogue. In part, this is a product of their adaption to the practical circumstances of contemporary nation states as well as the kind of communication and discourse that they foster. Instead, the media creates a

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more impersonal, less conversational form of communication that nevertheless still allows for a give and take of information and opinion well beyond the capability of a physical gathering of citizens. The resulting role that the media play is far less dialogical and participatory in its nature, and more ***symbolic*** and ***representational*** in character. The symbolic representation provided by the media is necessary in order to place the actions and intentions of the representative institutions of governance in a common context that every citizen, if they so desire, can access and understand.

In spite of all the disadvantages and problems inherent in the communicative context established by the media, there is a considerable dividend to be realized through their intervention and mediation in the public and political realm - enhanced visibility and accessibility. With the development of satellite technology, television broadcasters can place things before the public and make them widely known with a remarkable speed. In so doing, the intermediation of the media within the political process has brought about a transformation in both the nature and understanding of publicness. Through their act of ***publication*** and broadcast the media create a space that provides an unprecedented degree of popular access to the actions of government. More importantly, the space which results from the intervention of the media is an open-ended one in the sense that it is a creative and uncontrolled space, a space where new words and images can suddenly appear, where information previously hidden from view can become available, and where the consequences of this extended *publicity* or visibility cannot be fully anticipated and controlled (Thompson, 1995, 246 - 247). The media can render aspects of everyday life visible and observable in ways that previously were not possible to an indefinite number of people, thereby turning everyday events into a catalyst for action that spills well beyond the confines of the immediate locales in which they occur (***Op. Cit.***, 248). In The Media and Modernity (1995), John Thompson cites the videotape of the Los Angeles police beating Rodney King, as one well-known and dramatic instance of this phenomenon. But, to a lesser extent, the reach and impact of the media in this

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regard is also demonstrated by the manner in which the publicizing of the actions and/or words of various government officials has significantly altered the dynamic and workings of public life. One only has to think of the fall-out from the 1972 break in at the Watergate Hotel in Washington or the degree to which the presidency and the personal life of Bill Clinton were intermingled to see how the media's ability to publicize can affect and transform the character of the public sphere. In each instance, these events were publicized, discussed and debated in differently marketed and orientated media *products* in response to the needs and requirements of their specific target audience of consumers.

In light of the institutional composition of representative democracy, the media's role is best conceived of as one of *publicity* rather than as a forum for rational-critical debate and opinion formation. As a mechanism of *publicity* the media allow for a common access to information and opinion in spite of spatial/temporal factors that might separate the citizenry of a nation state. More to the point, the media allow for information to be widely distributed amongst both the representatives and ordinary citizens so that the competition for power and controversies about larger issues are exposed to relevant and searching criticism (Plamenatz, 1973, 179). Although it is not formulated by the majority of the public, the media permit the expression and propagation of a ***public*** opinion that is nonetheless distinct from ***governmental*** or ***official*** opinion. In addition, the multiplicity of general, specialized, and *niche* marketed media outlets provides the public with alternatives, if they should so choose, in the provision of information and opinion. The media furnishes a shared and *public* context within which all political actors operate. The media function as a *public* space in which a discussion of issues of social and political importance can be initiated by some of the individuals who stand outside the official circles of the state and government. That this discussion does not embrace the entirety of the public is not as significant or as beneficial as the fact that such deliberation and opinion formation occurs beyond the sphere and

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control of the state. As well, even though the majority of the citizenry do not directly participate in this discussion, its contents are nevertheless made accessible to them through the intervention of the media. Although a consequential aspect of the political system, this public debate does not define or constitute the role of the citizenry. Correspondingly, it is in the act of *publicizing* this debate by circulating it amongst the whole citizen population that the media best perform their role.

Endnotes

1. In a footnote to this sentence, Peter Hohendahl makes the following point of clarification: "Habermas's concept of the public sphere is not to be equated with that of "the public", i.e., of the individuals who assemble. His concept is directed instead at the institution, which to be sure only assumes concrete form through the participation of people. It cannot, however, be characterized simply as a crowd (footnote number 1 - Habermas, 1974, 142)."

2. For the sake of concision, attention will largely be given to only one of Curran's attempts at reappraisal. However, the approach taken in this piece is closely mirrored in the other two articles. In each case, the resulting sketch of a "revised conception of the democratic role of the media" is coupled with Curran's thoughts on and proposals for new ways "of organizing the media (Curran, 1991b, 82)."

3. Citizens do not necessarily use their vote to express particular or general preferences about public policy; they may also elect (or not elect) on the basis of the perceived character of the candidates (Manin, 1997, 177). Likewise, the public may cast their ballot so as to have a particular policy implemented or to prevent the incumbents from pursuing their current (and proposed) line of policy. In such an instance, a vote of negation is far more powerful than a vote of affirmation since by not reelecting the incumbents, voters do effectively prevent them from continuing with a particular policy. Whereas the election of a candidate on the basis of a policy they have proposed does not guarantee that the policy in question will be adopted or implemented. It is the *regular* and *recurring* character of elections that allows the public to influence the decisions of their representatives. Representatives who are subject to reelection have a built-in incentive to anticipate the future judgement of the electorate on the policies they pursue (***Op. Cit.***, 178).

4. This designation of two spheres of action within the structure of representative government draws from a similar distinction to be found in Schumpeter (1962).

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5. Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro have advanced the argument that despite the rational ignorance of most individuals, and the possibility that their policy preferences are shallow and unstable, collective public opinion is nonetheless stable, meaningful and indeed rational in a higher, if somewhat looser, sense: it is able to make distinctions; it is organized in coherent patterns; it is reasonable, based on the best available information; and it is adaptive to new information or changed circumstances, responding in similar ways to similar stimuli (Page & Shapiro, 1992, 14).

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Chapter Eight:

Conclusion

> *So the more equal men become and more individualism becomes a menace, the more necessary are newspapers. We should underrate their importance if we thought they just guaranteed liberty; they maintain civilization. I am far from denying that newspapers in democratic countries lead citizens to do very ill-considered things in common; but without newspapers there would be hardly any common action at all. So they mend more ills than they cause.*
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

This dissertation has investigated the vacillation between apprehension and aspiration that is a latent characteristic of Habermasian discussions of the political role and function of the media. In considering the goals that it frequently ascribes to the media as well as the kind of democratic order that the media are supposed to work for and produce, this dissertation has illuminated a conceptual tension within the Habermasian perspective. The presence of this tension in the Habermasian conception of the role of the media only complicates, if not obfuscates, the attempt to conceptualize the media as a political institution. While the media **are** a major forum for political communication, the nature of this forum remains theoretically underdeveloped and conceptually misconceived within this body of literature. It has been the argument of this dissertation that the political role of the media should not be defined and understood in relation to some abstract idea of democracy and public opinion, but rather in contrast with and connection to the concrete political institutions and practices of democracy. To do otherwise only produces a distorted conception of the theoretical and practical function of both the media and the character of the public sphere. Moreover, understanding democracy as an instrumental, public institutional arrangement for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions provides a means by which to envision the public sphere that

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sidesteps the ambiguity present in the Habermasian perspective. To this end, this dissertation has endeavoured to illustrate this theoretical perspective through an examination of how Habermas, and the literature inspired by his model, envisages and conceives the political role of the media in the practice and theory of democracy. This dissertation has argued that neither the media nor the public sphere function in isolation from the nature of the state and the institutions of government: instead their role and character are heavily influenced and shaped by the practices of government and its overall institutional structure. Accordingly, the role, character and function of both the media and the public sphere must be understood in conjunction with the practices, procedures and institutions of the respective system of government.

No matter how much of the accumulated theoretical and conceptual baggage surrounding the political role of the media is removed or revamped, the media will always remain an ambiguous institution. Within the Habermasian literature, as the present argument has suggested, the perception of equivocation about the democratic function of the media has been unnecessarily intensified because of the manner in which they have been theoretically conceived. Properly fathoming the role of the media requires that both the democratic process within which they operate as well as the concomitant values attached to this system of representative government are understood in a relatively clear manner.

The argument began, in chapter two, with an delineation and examination of the *traditional* responsibilities and duties commonly attributed to the media as a political institution. While the descriptions of these tasks vary from observer to observer, as well as over time, for Habermas such inventories embody and express a singular, if not, simple idea. By providing both the information necessary for deliberation as well as a common, public space within which this information could be circulated and discussed by individuals within and without *official* circles, the media have been construed as acting as the "mandatary of an enlightened public"

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(Habermas, 1996, 378). As such, the media have been seen as playing an significant role in the facilitation of rational-critical political expression and participation, albeit interaction of a mediated nature, in large-scale nation states. Within the Habermasian literature this kind of conception has been interpreted so as to directly link the overall vitality of democracy and its institutional and non-institutional public life to the performance of the media. As Hagen puts it, "through participation in mass communication citizens can be expected to learn and have their consciousness raised, a condition that will then increase the possibility of their participation in other social and political spheres (Hagen, 1992, 18)." However, as elaborated in chapter three, the assertion that the media function as a central guarantor of political democracy has been potentially compromised by the manner in which they currently interact with both the citizenry and the political process. Throughout all of the literature on the media, including work that draws on the social theories of Habermas, concern has been expressed that the developments and trends in contemporary media technology, the patterns of their ownership, as well as journalistic practice might serve to deprive the public of a clear, articulate voice in public affairs. The discourse surrounding the media has been one in which the promise of their power is tinged with the expectation of subversion and betrayal: "Whereas the age of communication promises to be an age of democracy, the truth is that *the media titillate us but do not educate us with genuine politics* (O'Neill, 1991, 41 - *emphasis* in original)". Although the manifestations of media dysfunction in this regard are believed to be both varied and numerous, most observers see the operation and organization of the media as private, profit-driven enterprises, and thus especially problematic in regard to the realization of democratic expectations. In light of such conclusions, the primary focus and attention tends to be on how the performance of the media might be made more conducive to producing a more vigorous public sphere.

Suggestions for improving the performance of the media vis-a-vis democratic goals tend to fall into two general categories. The first of these involves some form

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of alteration to or regulation of the patterns of ownership under which the media currently operate. The second of these involves some reform of the current professional practice of journalism in relation to the political and social realm. For the Habermasian literature the commercial operation and orientation of the media has functioned as an obstacle that hinders and inhibits the media from sustaining and producing the breadth and depth of deliberation thought necessary to a healthy public sphere. The democratic duties that the Habermasian position attributes to the media are drawn from the rich conceptual history readily accessible in eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophical and political discourse on the role of the media. Unfortunately, the theoretical ambiguities of this legacy and the values contained within it have not been subject to as much detailed attention or discussion as they necessarily should have by either Habermas or those inspired by his model. Residing at the core of these arguments is a vision of democracy and the media's relationship with it based upon several problematic, conflicting assumptions and conceptual silences.

In the fourth chapter, a close inspection of the duties assigned to the media by nineteenth century assertions that the "press" functions as the *fourth* estate revealed that these responsibilities are fraught with ambivalence and contradiction. Moreover, the myriad duties and functions assigned to the media as a political entity are fraught with contradiction: in that the media have been conceived of as both an independent participant in *public discussion* as well as a neutral, *open* forum for debate. At a conceptual level, the prescribed duties of the media comprise an uneasy, if ultimately unworkable, mixture of representation on the behalf of the public while simultaneously permitting and enabling the public's direct involvement in an ongoing conversation about social and political matters.

A tension between notions of direct participatory *authenticity* and the practical compromise of representation that need to be made in order to

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accommodate the logistics of the modern nation-state, is equally present in the image of democracy as a process of deliberation and debate amongst citizenry that the media are enlisted into maintaining and perpetuating. As examined in chapters five and six, the kind of ends that the Habermasian literature believes that the media *should* be working towards, in terms of conceptions of the public sphere and the role of the citizenry, are also encumbered with ambiguity and conceptual tension. While ***genuine democracy*** is the frequently cited objective toward which the media should pledge itself, the content and practicalities of such a goal are seldom explored in any great detail. The overwhelming focus in the Habermasian literature upon whether the media does or does not sustain a healthy public sphere has resulted in a distorted picture of the public sphere in terms of the mechanisms by which formal and informal control is *actually* exercised by the citizenry.

In part this distortion is a product of a conception of the public sphere as a *dialogical* space. Correspondingly, a conceptualization of the media as an instrument of extended face-to-face dialogue attempts to map the normative substance and goals of direct democratic practice onto structures that are primarily representational in form and content. This understanding introduces an unavoidable tension between the practical aims and normative thrust of how deliberation and discussion should be understood in the public sphere. On the one hand the practical aim of deliberation is to establish and institutionalize manageable means of facilitating discussion in an orderly and coherent fashion so as to achieve some form of consensus or common understanding as the end product. On the other hand, the normative thrust strives towards allowing all to participate, subjecting every issue to continuous examination and possible reformulation. The continual reexamination and reformulation of all political conflicts would appear to undermine the relevance and authoritativeness of the procedure established by the practical aim.

Moreover, such an envisaging of the public sphere transposes (or at least

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makes an attempt to) the model of communication present in concrete, localized episodic arenas onto the larger, more abstract forum sustained by the communications media. In doing this, this ideal of what the public sphere should be and how it should operate serves only to distort the nature and dynamics of the institutional structure of the public sphere. Far from being the central arena in which public deliberation takes place, the media provide a dispersed citizenry an abstract, symbolic means of gathering together and relating to one another as members of a common political entity.

Furthermore, the anxiety over the democratic sufficiency of the public only serves to distort the understanding of what healthy democratic citizenship should entail as well as the corresponding function and role of the media in contemporary circumstances. Habermasian theories about the media and democracy have been, at one level, attempts to integrate mass participation into the process of decision-making without undermining an overriding principle of rationality. Accordingly, the manner in which the media sustain and shape this mass participation has been the subject of a great deal of attention in regards to the perceived passivity and/or activeness of the audience. A prevalent judgement expressed in the Habermas-influenced literature is that - based upon the evidence gathered by a number of empirical studies on the political knowledge, opinion and behaviour of the citizenry - the democratic project has failed to realize or actualize what proponents and opponents alike have thought to be an essential feature, namely the active and informed participation of a politically competent citizenry (Simonds, 1989, 182). However, the ignorance or intelligence of the public in regards to its political participation and competency is a conceptual cul-de-sac that fails to clarify or shed any light upon the role of the public in a democracy. Representative democracy is not a system in which the public governs itself, but rather a system in which public policies and decisions are made subject to the verdict of the people through the election or dismissal of representatives (Manin, 1997 192). The central act of

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political communication between representatives and those they represent is that of voting. The institutional structure of representative government effects a division of labour in political expertise, policy making and communication (Page, 1996, 5). The idea is that legislators and other public officials will specialize in policymaking and learn a lot about it (***Ibid.***): the majority of, if not all, the deliberation and decision-making about matters of public importance will be conducted by elected representatives, selected experts and state bureaucrats. Contrarily, the political role of the citizen is substantially different from that of their elected representatives in that beyond the act of voting their realm of political action is relatively under-defined. Besides voting, the citizenry also has the right to form and express opinions outside the control of the government. Freedom of opinion ensures that the public can express their wishes and, through the vehicle of the media, have a forum in which these claims and demands may be brought to the attention of both those who govern and other citizens.

Habermasian discussions of the political role of the media have, as was argued in chapter seven, tended to focus solely upon the performance of the media as the primary reflection of the vitality of the public sphere. However, foregrounding the media as the pivotal place for and of public discussion serves to only distort the actual role played by the media in the democratic process. Too exclusive a concentration upon the media as ***the*** institution of the public sphere potentially overlooks the degree to which both the information conveyed and role played by the media have been shaped and moulded by the presence and workings of other governmental and non-governmental institutions. If anything, the Habermasian concern with the relationship between the media and democracy has tended to misread and misconstrue the institutions and objectives of representative democracy as a manifestation of democratic government as the "rule of the people".

Within this body of literature, the overriding concern is that the media *should*

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construct a role for the citizen that emphasizes and features those qualities and properties thought suitable to the needs of democracy. However, the role of the ordinary citizen is fashioned more by the procedures and institutions of the political process than by the workings and products of the media. Representative democracy is not a form of government in which the community directly governs itself. Instead, it is a system in which public policies and decisions are made subject to the verdict of the people by means of periodic and recurrent elections. Thus, elections are the key act of and forum for citizen participation in a representative system. However individuals choose to act in their capacity as citizens, the information that they will require to (minimally) perform their tasks, the type of discussions that they will have, and the kind of decisions they will make will be of a much different order than equivalent requirements, deliberations and decisions undertaken by the elected officials. In such a democratic system, representatives will be, as a consequence of their responsibilities and the nature of their role, both more informed and more active than the citizenry. But, the pool of information that either representative or citizen draws from is a shared, common one: differences in their mutual level of informedness is a function of individual inclination and/or the type of function that they perform within the institutional structure. More than a notion of a rational-critical public sphere, this is the theoretical and practical context in which the role of the media should be situated and understood.

The media are primarily oriented towards the public not as citizens but rather as consumers of their products. Even the *news* component of broadcasting and newspapers is in the business of selling not news or public information but an attentive audience to the advertisers who provide the bulk of their income and profit. In this regard the media, as a provider of information, are not motivated by the objective of enlightening citizens or facilitating their participation in the political process. Instead, they are in the business of assembling an audience for both their clients (the advertisers) and themselves. But in doing this, the *communication*

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conveyed by the media in its various products is differentiated in terms of its tone, level and degree of information: an issue will be subject to differing degrees of analysis and coverage in popular forums like television talk shows, news programs versus the kind of coverage found in forums like The New York Times. This market orientation allows different segments of the public to find media products that are addressed or targeted to their interests and demands. As such, the media can and do directly influence the political process and those who act within it: they accentuate particular issues and alternatives thereby bringing them to the forefront of *public* attention, influence the perception of the moods of the public, and otherwise shape the context in which government officials and other political actors operate (Cook, 1998, 11). Not only does information change as it passes through the filters of the media, but political actors respond to the agenda of the news and try to anticipate the media's response even before they decide what to do and how to do it (an aspect that has produced the growth industries in "spin" doctoring and image management) (***Op. Cit.***, 10). As a political institution the media are both simultaneously inside and outside of government. Too concentrated a focus upon either aspect will produce a distorted and ultimately ambivalent understanding of both the political role of the media and the character of the public sphere in representative democracy.

In light of the institutional composition of representative democracy, the media's role is best conceived of as involving the *representation* of images, information and opinion rather than the provision and preservation of a forum for rational-critical debate and opinion formation. As a mechanism of *representation*, or *publicity*, the media allow a geographically dispersed set of individuals to have common access to information and opinion in spite of the spatial and temporal factors that separate them as members of a nation state. Although it is not formulated by the majority of the public, the media permit the expression and propagation of a ***public*** opinion that is nonetheless distinct from ***governmental*** or ***official*** opinion. The media function as a *public* space in which a discussion of issues of social and

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political importance can be initiated by some of the individuals who stand outside the official circles of the state and government. That this discussion does not embrace the entirety of the public is not as significant or beneficial as the fact that such deliberation and opinion formation occurs beyond the sphere and control of the state. In addition, the multiplicity of differentiated marketed media outlets (general, popular, specialized, "niche", etc.) provides the public with alternatives, if they should so choose, in their search for information and opinion. The media furnish a shared and *public* context within which all political actors operate. As well, even though the majority of the citizenry do not directly participate in this discussion, its contents are nevertheless made accessible to them through the intervention of the media. Although a consequential aspect of the political system, this public debate does not define or constitute the role of the citizenry. The role of the citizen in the political realm is one that is relatively under-defined and open-ended. While voting is the one evident task and function that citizens perform, it does not constitute the limit or horizon within which they must act - other options of political participation and involvement are available to them, if they choose to pursue them. In this context, the role of the media is best understood as one of *publicity* by providing for the circulation of debate, opinion and information about issues of common political, social and economic concern amongst the entire citizen population.

Conceiving the public sphere in this fashion grounds the communication of opinion and information through the media within the context of concrete political decision and action. Without such a theoretical component, conceptualisations of the public sphere do not possess a realistic or practical notion of democratic practice in the institutional context of representative politics. Participation in the public sphere established and conveyed through the media does not offer citizens the means by which to translate their discussions into practical, political activity: while they provide a space where individuals can observe and reflect, the media do so without providing the effective means by which individuals can act or implement any

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decision that they reach.

Habermas's re-vitalized public sphere appears to exist as a realm of abstract, if ultimately idle, talk in which *public* deliberation is detached from the local practices by which individuals might engage in political activity. In all probability, any solutions or conclusions reached in this process of abstract, universalized deliberation will be equally disconnected from the context and praxis of concrete politics. For the citizenry of a state, the public space enjoined by the media does not function as the primary or lone site for political activity. Indeed, the *universal* public sphere of the mass media is relatively apolitical and participation in it should not be considered as the paradigmatic form of democratic participation (Spinosa et al., 1997, 86). Rather it is within the specific institutional settings of schools, employment places, and so on, that one will find more appropriate and realistic models of political participation in representative democracy. In such an institutional environment the purpose of politics is neither the formation of rational-critical consensus nor the transformation of the interests and opinions of the public but rather the instrumental, public process of substantive decision-making. Similarly, political deliberation and communication within a democracy are primarily a means to a non-political end; they are only subsidiarily an end in themselves (Elster, 1986, 121).

An underlying thrust in the argument of this dissertation has been that the aura of uncertainty present in the Habermasian discourse about the media is parasitic on the deeply rooted ambivalence present in current understandings of the public sphere and its relationship to democratic political practice. In particular, this uncertainty has centred around what is meant and understood by democracy and the consideration of how its goals and objectives are to be best practised and realized. All too frequently, discussions about the character of the public sphere by Habermas and those inspired by his model are based upon an understanding of the political process that is, in itself, vague and distorted. As a result, their consequent theoretical

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depictions and understandings of the both the role of the media and the character of the public sphere have been enveloped by a sense of ambivalence. This equivocation, as this dissertation has argued, has prevented their development of an accurate conceptualisation of the character and nature of the public sphere. In order to circumvent this ambiguity, I have argued that the theoretical treatment of the public sphere should be more closely aligned with the concrete practices, institutions and goals of the political process. That is, to better envision and conceive the public sphere, observers need to adopt an analytical attitude that recognizes the degree to which the public sphere and other non-governmental institutions are shaped and directed by the nature of the political system and institutional structure of the state. Non-governmental institutions, like the media, can and do influence the workings of the political system, but they are not antecedent to or inevitably opposed to political institutions (Schudson, 1997, 314). Correctly understanding the nature of the public sphere requires that the observer start with an examination of the theory and practice of politics at work in the state in question.

Seeing politics as a public, instrumental process provides a viable means by which to navigate the ambiguity imbued within Habermasian understandings of the function of the public sphere. The character of the public sphere, I have argued, is shaped more by the nature of the state and its institutional composition and configuration than it is by organizations like the media and other actors who operate within it. Communication and deliberation within the public sphere is formed and influenced by similar instrumental concerns and ends: such activity is geared not towards the "transformation" of the concerns and interests of citizens, but rather towards the facilitation of the specific goals and ends that citizens - as both individuals and members of various groups within society - may desire. That is, democratic public spaces are not places in which citizens' interests are transformed, but instead serve as spaces in which these interests might be expressed and acted upon. The function of the public sphere is one of providing a space in which ideas

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and information are made *public* in the sense that they are placed before the citizenry - in turn, the citizenry can utilize this information as they desire in furtherance of their own goals and ends. In this context, the public sphere should be conceived of as a ***representational*** space that permits citizens to have equal access to information, ideas and debate. The public sphere stands as a de-spatialized and non-dialogical space in which contrasting opinions on the actions of and options for the government are presented before the public. Although the public sphere functions as a space of symbolic representation rather than that of dialogical interaction, it is nonetheless a space in which opinion is made ***public*** in that it is being espoused and voiced by people outside governmental circles.

Clearly, the model of the public sphere as a representational space will need to be developed, clarified and refined in terms of its relationship to the process of decision-making and policy making. There are a number of areas where this conception of the public sphere might be further explored and evaluated. For instance, the differentiation of a number of roles and institutional spaces within the public sphere raises the issue of how these different elements interact and interrelate with one another. Furthermore, there is also the consideration of the impact that this differentiation of political roles and spaces has upon the workings of the political process and the manner in which individuals can and will participate in the institutions of the state. While citizens may choose to act and participate in one of the various localized *public spheres*, the question of how these arenas are affected by and relate to the larger, *universal* public sphere of the media will need to be examined further. In particular, attention could be given to the kind of impact that the discourse, information and images conveyed by the media have upon the localized political units of action. Whether they are intended to or otherwise, the wide variety of media messages in both news and entertainment have the potential of acting as teachers of values and ideologies as well as providing the images by which individuals will interpret the world. Although the mass media are not the only

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source individuals use in their day-to-day discussion, they constitute a public knowledge that is both accessible and common to all in ways that personal experience and experiential knowledge are not.

As well, the notion of differentiated spheres and roles also raises the matter of the kind of impact and influence that these subsidiary spheres, organized around their own institutional structure, processes, and sets of norms and interests, can exert upon the larger realm of representation of the media-sphere. The dissemination of information from the media into the localized arenas of political action may be the more dominant symbolic *flow* but it also plausible that *local* issues and interests possessing an universal appeal can work their way into the public spotlight.

While there have been numerous disagreements, accounts of the public sphere and the role of the media have been also marked by confusion as scholars have tended to speak past each other. The prevailing tendency within the Habermasian literature to treat the media as the "pre-eminent" institution of the public sphere has both distorted the nature of its role as well as precluded reflection on other important issues. When looking at the public sphere, Habermas and other observers have tended to see the media as being the definitive forum/institution in terms of how the public sphere mediates between state and civil society. This kind of perspective tends to focus on media products and tries, by analysing the products themselves, to read off their consequences for both the health of the public sphere and the political involvement of the citizenry (Thompson, 1994, 28). But this kind of assumption overlooks the extent to which the media are just one, and probably not a "pre-eminent" one at that, of many institutions and forums within the public sphere. As was argued in chapter five, in understanding the public sphere one cannot privilege the role of the media without taking into account the numerous other arenas in which citizens can more directly interact with one another and the institutions of the political system. In their everyday lives, individuals are presented with a number of

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other particular and localized avenues and opportunities for public discourse and political participation besides the media. The public sphere is made up of a number of intermediary institutions and organizations that vary in terms of their practical and thematic accessibility to the public. These arenas arise within various concrete institutional settings, within schools, work places, residential committees, political organizations, juries, voluntary associations, political parties and so on (Mann, 1990, 87). More than anything else these are the sites in which the potential and actuality of concrete dialogical deliberation and the political participation and action can occur.

Engagement in the public sphere, I have also argued, is not the fundamental act of citizenship in a representative democracy. The notion of citizenship exists not in an abstract, psychological sense of association created and fostered by discourse and dialogue, but rather it exists in the shared activities, goals and concrete practices that individuals undertake in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, interaction in the public sphere is generally concurrent with some form of concrete political action in one of the localized, particular institutional arenas that make up the state. That is, interaction and communication in the public sphere can be part of the conflicts and activities occurring in these particular arenas: political actors can and will appeal to *public* opinion as a means of marshalling support for their particular point of view or as a way of establishing a context a tone in public life that favours their point of view over that of their opponents. However, this discursive and symbolic framework is a by-product of political activity and not, in itself, the main purpose of such activity nor its main forum.

The public space brought into being by the media is not the central arena in which politics occurs within a representative system of government. Although discursive and symbolic resources found in the media are a key part of an individual's role as a citizen, they do not define the type of political participation and

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interaction that citizens normally have within the institutions of representative government. The information and opinion in the media may be important to individuals before the act of voting, but participation in this kind of *public* discussion is not **the** primary mode by which citizens participate in politics. Generally, individuals participate in the act of governance through the periodic casting of ballots: likewise, their main form of communication with the institutions and officials of the state is through the ballot box. The public space enjoined by the intervention of the media is a certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and symbolic exchange (Thompson, 1994, 36). The political significance of the media lies not so much in the content of what they convey to the public, as it is in the fact that this material is being made available and accessible to all. This availability and accessibility of information, opinion and debate is a vital feature of any democratic system, but it is largely symbiotic with the processes and institutional configuration of the system of government. The public sphere of the media connects citizens and politicians to each other through its presentation of a common informational and symbolic framework within which each can perform their respective roles.

To conclude, I have argued that viewing democratic politics as an instrumental, public process results in a corresponding conception of the character of the public sphere that circumvents the ambiguity that has beset Habermasian understandings. In order to understand correctly the role played by the media it is vital that the "tasks of citizenship" and what they entail for the public are considered in terms of the requirements of the institutions and procedures of the relevant political system. Understanding the character of the public sphere necessitates that it be placed in the appropriate theoretical and practical context: this context is provided and generated by the institutions, procedures and goals of its corresponding political system. Moreover, the question of how the public sphere mediates between the state and civil society is one that is best answered by examining the nature of the

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state and the kind of communicative context that is required and necessary to it in terms of its institutions and decision-making procedures.

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