

**WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY:  
PUBLIC BROADCASTING, THE IDEAL OF DEMOCRATIC  
COMMUNICATION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that the revitalization of the public sphere is inextricably linked to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public service media. I demonstrate how the problematic assumptions underlying Jürgen Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere also plague traditional understanding of public broadcasting. I critique the notion of one, all-encompassing arena of discursive interaction as well as the insistence on a sharp separation between public and private realms and between civil society and the State. I indicate how these assumptions reinforce the coercive, nonpublic and self-deceptive nature of both Habermas' ideal public sphere and traditional public broadcasting programming and administration. I then identify the constitutive components of the ideal of democratic communication as they manifest themselves in existing or yet to be envisaged public service media.

Public service media based on the ideal of democratic communication attempts to extend citizens' local, regional, national and international sensibilities. These territorial, cultural and social sensibilities cannot be dictated from either the centre or the regions. They must emanate from, and reverberate through, as many different types and levels of media as possible. Public service media based on the ideal of democratic communication also recognizes the crucial role that its programming plays in the definition and enactment of social identities and group opinion formation. It increases citizens' and consumers' freedom and equality by providing both access points and integrative discursive arenas in which the processes of self-realization and democratic decision-making can flourish. The communicative ethics required to realize this ideal rests on the integration of four ethical principles: pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability. Public broadcasters' attempts to promote these ethical principles must be premised on forms of self-management and intra-public coordination which emphasize a dynamic combination of autonomy, trust and mutual accountability.

I conclude the thesis with a case study based on the elimination of local public television programming in Windsor, Ontario. This study reinforces the theoretical and practical links among innovative public service media, the creation of an active citizenry and the development of democracy.

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce mémoire, je soutiens que le renouvellement de l'espace public est inextricablement lié à la réalisation de l'idéal de la communication démocratique implicite dans les médias de services publics. Je démontre de quelle façon les suppositions problématiques sous-jacentes de la conception de l'espace public idéal de Jurgen Habermas nuie aussi à la compréhension traditionnelle de la radiodiffusion publique. Je critique la notion d'une seule arène d'interaction discursive ainsi que l'insistance sur une séparation nette entre les domaines publics et privés et entre la société civile et l'État. J'indique comment ces suppositions renforcent la nature coercive, non-publique et décevante de l'espace public idéal d'Habermas et de la programmation et de l'administration de la radiodiffusion publique. Par la suite, j'identifie les composantes constitutives de l'idéal de la communication démocratique telles qu'elles se manifestent au sein des médias de services publics existants ou envisagés.

Les médias de services publics basés sur l'idéal de la communication démocratique essaient d'étendre les sensibilités locales, régionales, nationales et internationales des citoyens. Ces sensibilités territoriales, culturelles et sociales ne peuvent être dictées du centre ou des régions. Elles doivent se manifester par l'entremise d'autant de types et de niveaux de médias que possible. Les médias de services publics basés sur l'idéal de la communication démocratique reconnaissent aussi le rôle crucial de leur programmation dans la définition des identités sociales et dans la formation des opinions de groupe. Elles augmentent la liberté et l'égalité des citoyens et des consommateurs en fournissant à la fois des points d'accès et des forums de discussions interactives dans lesquels peuvent s'épanouir les processus de réalisation de soi et de prises de décisions démocratiques. L'éthique communicative requise afin de réaliser cet idéal repose sur l'intégration de quatre principes : le pluralisme, l'analyse intrinsèque, la démocratie participatoire et la responsabilité mutuelle. Les tentatives de la part des radiodiffuseurs publics de promouvoir ces principes doivent reposer sur des formes d'auto-gestion et de coordination intra-publique accentuant une combinaison dynamique d'autonomie, de confiance et de responsabilité mutuelle.

Je conclue ce mémoire avec une étude de cas basée sur l'élimination de la programmation télévisuelle locale à Windsor (Ontario). Cette étude renforce les liens théoriques et pratiques parmi les médias de services publics, la création d'une citoyenneté active et le développement de la démocratie.



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## INTRODUCTION

Since the early nineteen eighties, the voices of scholars, critics, legislators and government officials asserting "public service broadcasting is in crisis" have reached a crescendo worldwide. Many, such as British broadcasting scholar Jay Blumler, see the crisis as the result of governments' and legislators' increasing tendency to embrace economic rationalism as their guiding ideology. According to this view, when economic rationalism becomes the determining factor, the emphasis is shifted from collective to individual fulfilment, from symbolic meaning exchange to information transmission and from citizens rights and goods to consumers desires and products. The challenge then, in Blumler's view, is to promote and protect "the vulnerable values"<sup>1</sup> of public broadcasting at stake in the present debate.

Others such as Williard Rowland, writing from the United States where the marginalized public service broadcaster is under further financial and political threat, believe that the crisis stems from the paucity of the discourse about public service broadcasting. As Rowland notes, in the United States (and arguably even in countries such as Britain and Canada which have steadfast public service traditions) there is:

....almost no literature or on-going critical commentary that can state the case for public broadcasting in broad, universal terms, envisioning it as a major cultural and political institution that might command sustained majority attention<sup>2</sup>.

The challenge is thus to define the purpose and pertinence of public broadcasting in the larger social, political and moral order in which it operates.

For his part, Newton Minow in his foreword to Public Service Broadcasting in a Multi-Channel Environment suggests that the crisis is fundamentally rooted in the generalized failure to adequately define "the public interest" and "the common good". The premise of this approach is that these terms, together with concepts such as "quality" and "diversity" must be further refined in order to clarify the standards against which public broadcasting can and should be judged. If Minow's assertion that "there is universal agreement that notions of public interest and common good should drive the future of public service broadcasting"<sup>3</sup> were indeed valid, this might provide the starting point for a reconsideration of public broadcasting's role in a multi-channel environment. Ironically, however, as Trine Syvertsen argues in "Public Television in Crisis: Critiques Compared in Norway and Britain", the crisis stems, in part, from the fact that there is little agreement about the *source* of the crisis and even less agreement on what positive elements of public broadcasting should dictate its future direction<sup>4</sup>.

Syvertsen herself defines the crisis as primarily one of public service *institutions*<sup>5</sup>. She thus argues that it is not so much public broadcasting ideals which are in crisis as the institutions themselves. While Syvertsen offers countless reasons for the institutional crises, ranging from insufficient government funding, to over-emphasis on commercial imperatives to

paternalistic, centralized command, one of her key points of contention is the institutions' failure to be both responsive and accountable to the publics they were enacted to serve.

In keeping with this emphasis on public broadcasting institutions' responsiveness and accountability as the crux of the crisis, Canadian broadcasting scholars such as Marc Raboy and Ross Eaman increasingly characterize the crisis as a struggle over cultural democracy. Starting from the premise that "...public cultural institutions are in crisis in every sector and in all parts of the world"<sup>6</sup>, Raboy et al argue that the most significant challenge facing public broadcasting "...is to invent new mechanisms for the empowerment of social actors"<sup>7</sup>. These mechanisms must enable citizens to intervene socially, economically and politically both as individuals and as members of integrated communities. Ross Eaman, speaking in less global and more local terms, qualifies the crisis of cultural democracy as the CBC's failure to enable "...the public, rather than the market or the state, to determine the kind of radio and television services that public funds are used to provide"<sup>8</sup>.

European broadcasting scholar, Stig Hjarvard, takes this argument even further, beyond the boundaries of cultural democracy. He contends that the public broadcasting crisis, is not only an economic, political and cultural one, but also a manifestation of a "broader social crisis, which can be characterised as a crisis of representation"<sup>9</sup>. As Hjarvard explains in "Pan-European Television News: Towards a European Political Public Sphere?":

Public service broadcasting has played a key role in the construction of a national culture and political unity, but as a result of the disintegration of the national community in general and the erosion of the national state's authority in particular, it is becoming even more difficult to exercise this function. The crisis of representation is [thus] rooted in a loss of authority<sup>10</sup>.

The crisis as conceived by Hjarvard can only be managed if both public broadcasting employees and audiences can routinely question the media's practices of representation and internal power structures. The practices of representation which dictate production, distribution and consumption values must therefore be continuously open to debate, dissent and renegotiation.

Yet whether these scholars choose to interpret the root causes of the public broadcasting crisis as a crisis of broadcasting values, discourse, institutions, cultural democracy, or even of representation itself, there is remarkable similarity in their use of the term "crisis" to categorize the current state of public broadcasting worldwide. The definition of "crisis" which those at the intellectual centre of the debate most often espouse is that of "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which decisive change is impending - **one with a distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome**"<sup>11</sup> (bold mine). Importantly, however, crisis can also mean a decisive moment, a juncture of sorts in which a significant concurrence or convergence of events can lead to radical change<sup>12</sup>.

Consequently, in contrast with the general tendency to assume that public controversy over the purpose of public broadcasting is a sign of

stagnation, I welcome it as a window of opportunity. I want to discuss the future of public service media not in terms of endings, but of beginnings; not in terms of closures but of openings; not in terms of radical uncertainties, but of radical possibilities. As John Keane argues in The Media and Democracy, "Freedom of communication...is an ongoing project without an ultimate solution. It is a project which constantly generates new constellations of dilemmas and contradictions"<sup>13</sup>. The challenge is not to suppress or eliminate these dilemmas and contradictions, but to heighten them, thereby bringing them more clearly into view. To heighten these tensions, however, one must necessarily recognize that public broadcasting is one among many social forces and processes which are continuously converging and intersecting and thus always in flux.

In stressing the dynamic, diachronic aspects of public broadcasting instead of concentrating on a freeze-frame balance of constraints, I propose to explore and critique the ideal of democratic communication which I believe both underlies the concept of public broadcasting and motivated its creation in the first place. I readily acknowledge that this ideal of democratic communication has not been fully realized. Moreover, its values have not been consistently espoused, historically speaking, by the corporations, governments and legislators responsible for providing political, creative and financial direction to public broadcasting institutions worldwide. I thus wish to avoid linking the revitalization of this public broadcasting ideal and the values implicit in it, to the

survival of traditional public broadcasting institutions themselves.

The problem with linking the ideal inextricably to a certain form of institution is, as Raymond Williams rightly notes: "...attitudes to others, certain forms of address, certain tones and styles and certain...arguable assumptions are often embodied in solid, practical institutions which then teach the models from which they start"<sup>14</sup>. To posit the traditional public broadcasting institutions in their present or past form as the necessary future embodiment of the ideal may thus be to limit both the realm of questioning and the possibility of revitalizing the ideal itself. Therefore, the primary purpose of reconsidering and recovering what I perceive to be the degraded ideal of democratic communication is not to rescue public broadcasting institutions from radical redefinition, but rather to demonstrate why they embody a worthy ideal and values to begin with. Ultimately, the point is that this ideal of democratic communication and its implicit values should guide the ongoing pursuit of a revitalized public sphere regardless of what institutional or technological form public service media may assume in the future.

But what do I mean by democratic communication and on what grounds do I posit this as the ideal underlying public broadcasting? Moreover, what are the values implicit in this ideal and how do or should they manifest themselves in public broadcasting programming and institutions? More generally, what is the relationship between media of public communication and democracy and how does one contribute to the full expression and development of the other?



These are the central questions with which I will grapple in this thesis. My starting point in exploring the ideal of democratic communication is that public broadcasting should "defend the openness of human conversation [and communication] against all those temptations and real threats that seek closure"<sup>15</sup>.

What are the values which would motivate me to argue in favour of this openness of human conversation as the foundation for the ideal of democratic communication? I could point to the value of providing a voice for the role of reasoned argument and debate over issues of civic and electoral concern. I could also argue for the importance of creating programming which broadens horizons, stimulates curiosity and increases knowledge and appreciation of one's community, country and the world. I could further mention the value of ensuring indigenous and democratic control of, and participation in, both the production and distribution of programming. And one cannot overlook the value of maintaining an environment in which the creative community is strongly encouraged to innovate. Finally, I could extol the value of securing a venue in which citizens can invent and reinvent their individual and collective identities and position and reposition their individual and collective interests. However, as a launching pad for my exploration and critique of the ideal of democratic communication, I posit only the value of openness for openness' sake.

What purpose prompts me to argue for openness for openness' sake, at least as a starting point for my consideration of the ideal? In political terms, it is to promote dialogue in which it is not, as Valérie Ganne contends, "les plus habiles à utiliser les mots qui sont vainqueurs, mais les plus habiles à utiliser les idées"<sup>16</sup>. In practical terms, it is as Clifford Geertz suggests "to increase the precision with which we vex one another"<sup>17</sup>. And in theoretical terms, it is to open up what Tosten Hagerstrand describes as a "possibility space...which helps one's thinking to move beyond what is habitually taken for granted and also to develop a feeling for boundaries beyond which it is not possible, risky or at least costly, to move in practice"<sup>18</sup>. The end result of this process, I hope, will be to promote what Jean Bethke Elshtain describes as "a generous openness to sharp disagreement - democratic feistiness" as a communicative goal.

At this point I want to note that in choosing to explore and dissect the ideal of public broadcasting rather than its specific programs and policies, I am not trying to avoid the nitty-gritty empirical reality of public broadcasting. Rather, I am seeking a way to better articulate its possibilities, one that moves us away from the stifling language and siege mentality of "the crisis" to a more forward-looking, pluralistic and liberating language of reappropriation and rediscovery. Or as Richard Bernstein puts it, I seek to "gesture in opposite directions at the same time...to keep alive the distance of questioning and yet be prepared to act decisively in the here and now"<sup>19</sup>.

As a result, while my thesis focuses primarily on philosophical issues and questions, it also speaks to the concerns of those who posit public broadcasting as being in crisis and who seek to redeem its institutions from public and political apathy or social obsolescence. For instance, to explore the ideal underlying public broadcasting and more generally public service media, is to confront, first and foremost, as does Williard Rowland, the paucity of the discourse about the purpose of public service media in the larger social, political and moral order. It is also to recognize, as does Jay Blumler, that there are potentially irretrievable public service values at stake; values which are increasingly muted by the rhetoric and reality of economic rationalism. Moreover, given my emphasis on opening up human communication, I necessarily address, as does Newton Minow, the cooption of concepts such as "public interest" and "common good". Clearly, these cooptions orchestrated by those who defend narrow visions of the role of public service media serve to severely curtail the subjects discussed and the people who speak. In addition, my thesis acknowledges, as does Trine Syvertsen, that public service institutions in their present form are incapable of realizing the ideal of democratic communication and in fact, do a disservice to the citizens they were meant to empower. Finally, my work reinforces observations made by Marc Raboy, Ross Eaman and Stig Hjarvard, that the struggle over cultural democracy is inextricably linked to the redefinition of the triangular relationship between the state, civil society and the market.

However, my entry point to discuss all of these compelling concerns is not traditional broadcasting analyses which historically contextualize, in political and economic terms, the legislative and corporate decisions affecting a given public broadcaster and then make policy recommendations on this basis. Rather, I take as my point of departure the theory of the public sphere. As does Peter Golding, I begin from the premise that "we urgently need a philosophy of communications which locates and understands the role of communication processes and institutions in the public sphere"<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, I concur with Marc Raboy that "the most pressing question [today]...is whether media activity in fact promotes or restricts the functioning of a democratic public sphere"<sup>21</sup>. This approach is rooted in the belief that the ability to articulate to citizens worldwide the potential contribution of public service media in a revitalized public sphere will mark, more than any other factor, the boundaries of public service media's relevance in the next century.

Yet in order to determine the role of public broadcasting in the public sphere and to suggest the conditions which would lead to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication, one must first familiarize oneself with the theory of the public sphere. As a result, my thesis begins with a reconsideration of Jürgen Habermas' seminal text The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Since the 1973 publication of this the first of Jürgen Habermas' post-doctoral works, most attempts to apply the theory of the public sphere to specific instances or institutions of modern life

have inevitably addressed the theoretical framework provided by Habermas. To this end, Chapter 2 provides a brief examination of Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere, together with the conditions which Habermas argues led to its rise and fall. In addition, I explore the "refeudalization" of the public sphere as documented by Habermas as well as the conditions which he believes could lead to the revitalization of the public sphere today. Having reiterated the key components of Habermas' theory, I analyze three problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere and the critiques which have ensued from them. First, I question his belief, as does Nancy Fraser, that it is both possible and desirable to bracket status differentials to reason as equals in public sphere deliberations. I contend that the fundamental condition of discursive interaction underlying Habermas' ideal public sphere is unacceptably rooted in a pure liberal notion of freedom as freedom from coercion. I argue that this emphasis on negative freedom as the basis for deliberation unmasks a vision of the public sphere as a single, all-encompassing, unifying discursive arena. This vision prevents Habermas from recognizing the simultaneous need for both a multiplicity of counter-public spheres and integrative discursive arenas. In contrast with Habermas then, I argue that the ideal public sphere must be premised on a more encompassing definition of freedom, one that multiplies and enhances the opportunities for counter-publics to denaturalize and thus contest the varying levels of freedom exercised by all public sphere participants. To this end, I examine attempts by

theorists such as Miriam Hansen, Peter Dahlgren, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, among others, to explore the emancipatory potential that resides in notions of partial- and counter- publics and counter-public spheres.

Second, I challenge Habermas' conflation of "bourgeois" with "homme" and his strict insistence on maintaining a sharp separation between public and private realms. I argue that this insistence results in the naturalization of dominant interests and thus the predetermination of the common good in public sphere deliberations. It also fuels a failure to recognize that exchanges in the public sphere are as much, if not more, about providing an opportunity for participants to invent and reinvent their individual and collective identities and shape and reshape their individual and collective interests, as they are about reaching any type of rational consensus. Moreover, as I demonstrate using an argument developed by Michael Warner, Habermas' insistence on maintaining a strict separation between public and private realms is also untenable because it requires a rhetoric of personal abstraction which is an unequally available resource. Significantly, even if this rhetoric could be equally espoused by all, it must be rejected because it promotes self-deception in dominant and minority groups alike, thereby undermining the opportunities for any of the participants to engage in the ongoing process of clarifying which issues should be of public and/or private concern.

Finally, I contest Habermas' insistence on a clear separation between civil society and the state, an insistence which relegates civil society to

opinion-generating functions. Contrary to Habermas' stated intent, this insistence does not eliminate coercion and domination; if anything it reinforces the coercive and nonpublic tendencies of the bourgeois public sphere. Therefore, by limiting civil society's role to an opinion-generating one, Habermas undermines the possibility that civil society will exercise anything more than volitional freedom, that is to say the freedom to choose between predetermined purposes and ideas. Instead, I seek and support a redefinition of civil society's relationship with both the market and the state. This redefinition should create and sustain repeated and purposeful opportunities for participants to become actively involved in decision-making processes which bring about change. In order to determine how and in which contexts members of civil society can best exercise authoritative decision-making roles in mass-mediated societies, I briefly reconsider the nature and intent of mass-mediated production and reception processes.

The critique and revision of the Habermasian ideal of the public sphere thus provides a springboard for my subsequent analysis of the ideal of democratic communication as it manifests itself in public broadcasting discourse and decision-making. In the development of my central arguments, this critique serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, I intend to demonstrate that the same three problematic assumptions implicit in Habermas' vision of the public sphere, assumptions which limit the full and free development of discursive arenas, also underlie traditional understanding and administration of

public broadcasting. On the other hand, I plan to argue that once these assumptions are critiqued and revised, public broadcasting can come closer to realizing its implicit ideal of democratic communication thereby contributing significantly to the revitalization of the public sphere itself. In this sense then, I contend that the realization of the ideal public sphere is inextricably linked to the realization of the ideal of public service media. While many of my observations will apply to several of the countries currently grappling with the public broadcasting conundrum, when detailed examples are warranted, I consider the relationship between public service media and the public sphere primarily as it has been experienced in the Canadian context. Moreover, although many of my remarks will reverberate forcefully for both radio and television broadcasting, my use of the term public broadcasting is primarily in reference to television.

Chapter 3 thus begins with an explanation of how public broadcasting, like Habermas' ideal public sphere, has been premised in part on the problematic assumption that status differentials could be bracketed to enable citizens to deliberate as if they were equals. Having indicated in Chapter 2 the definitions of freedom and equality implicit in this stance, I will explore their implications for public broadcasting. In particular, I will argue that the oversimplified and circumscribed definition of freedom as negative freedom with its accompanying definition of equality as a highly qualified equality of opportunity undermines the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public



broadcasting. In order to retrieve and revitalize the ideal, I will thus argue with the help of John Keane that more complex notions of equality and liberty, ones which according to Keane "...promote and maximize equality *with* liberty"<sup>22</sup> need to be envisaged as cornerstones of public service media.

This reconsideration of the range of freedom and liberty required to realize the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public broadcasting leads, in turn, to the realization that the maximization of equality *with* liberty necessitates more, not fewer, means and venues in which citizens can participate in the social and political activities and discussions which impact on their daily lives. Insofar as public broadcasting is concerned, this results, first and foremost, in the recognition that fear of a multi-channel and multi-media universe as the bane of public broadcasting is misguided. Rather, it is my contention that specialty services, access broadcasters and new communication networks are essential and complementary dialogical partners which can legitimize national public broadcasters' potential role as one among many integrative arenas of discursive interaction. The multiplication of communication networks in a post-scarcity broadcasting era contributes to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication insofar as they, like the counter publics posited opposite Habermas' integrative public sphere, provide the training ground and discursive space for the creation and redefinition of social identities and group opinion formation.

Obviously, this acknowledgement of the need for national public broadcasters to seek strategic alliances with a myriad of communication media in order to create pluralistic and complex networks of freedom and equality is not without its theoretical problems. For instance, how *should* public broadcasters position themselves in relation to the plurality of communication networks operating at the local, regional, national and international levels? What types of socialization would public broadcasters' decisions to align themselves in definitive ways along the local-global continuum of discursive interaction reinforce? What forms of alienation and/or inclusiveness do public broadcasters' administrative and philosophical decisions imply for various groups and individuals and what are the risks or promises implicit in them? In a nutshell, which decisions are most likely to promote the realization of the ideal of democratic communication?

Clearly, these crucial questions have no finite answers because as Peter Uwe Hohendahl explains in "The Public Sphere: Models and Boundaries":

...the boundaries and structure of the spaces where public debates of political and social issues take place are not stable; they have to be negotiated in accordance with the [changing] needs and values of the community<sup>23</sup>.

Fully acknowledging that these questions cannot be answered once and for all, Chapter 3 nevertheless attempts to articulate some of the needs and values which should motivate tentative answers to these questions. In particular, I contend that the symbiotic relationship that public broadcasters should seek to develop both internally, amongst their local, regional and national broadcast

components, and externally, in their relations with other communications media and networks can be best understood in light of Anthony Giddens' observations on the consequences of modernity.

I start from Giddens' premise that the thoroughly "reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups"<sup>24</sup> is the legacy of modernity. I then argue that public broadcasters' decisions should be fuelled in large part by the need to provide favourable experiences at what Giddens coins "access points"<sup>25</sup>. According to Giddens, these experiences minimize individuals' sense of risk and elicit their trust. Moreover, they encourage "a form of 'faith' in which the confidence vested in probable outcomes expresses a commitment to something [in this case, to the ideal of democratic communication] rather than just a cognitive understanding"<sup>26</sup>. Public broadcasters' ability to secure such a commitment from the citizens they serve depends in large part on their own commitment to the extension of human sensibilities through all levels and types of public service media.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the second problematic assumption underlying both Habermas' ideal public sphere and public broadcasting, namely the ultimately counterproductive insistence on a sharp separation between public and private realms. To begin, Habermas' conflation of "bourgeois" with "homme" which justified the exorcism of private concerns from the bourgeois public sphere is compared and contrasted with a similar conflation of "the

public" with "the audience" which I charge has often dictated Canadian public broadcasting decision-making. I argue that, in the same way that propertied males in the bourgeois public sphere equated their class interests with those of society in general, Canadian political and cultural elites have assumed their nationalist goals with regards to public broadcasting to be coterminous with those of "the public". As a result, in the name of the national or public interest they have repeatedly pigeon-holed Canadian public broadcasting within the boundaries of that which encourages national unity, promotes consensus and fosters a collective consciousness. Moreover, through their faulty conflation of "the public" with "the audience" they have attempted to silence private interests other than their own in order to predetermine the common good and severely limit the openness of human conversation which public broadcasting in its ideal form should seek to promote.

The strict insistence on the separation of public and private realms which characterized Habermas' ideal public sphere is thus also shown to be counterproductive to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public broadcasting. For instance, I argue that the same rhetoric of disincorporation required to deliberate in the bourgeois public sphere is required to engage in Canadian public broadcasting programming and decision-making. As a result, Canadians are forced to subsume their individual interests as consumers and citizens to the promotion and protection of the national good when questioning both the programming and the policies of national public

broadcasting. This practice is particularly self-defeating for minority subjects who suffer greatly at the hands of a Canadian public broadcasting system whose explicit mandate naturalizes and thus limits the opportunities to contest the dominant groups' definitions and delimitation of the national good. Crucially, however, this assumption denies all Canadians - whether members of dominant or subordinate groups - the opportunity to determine for themselves how and where their individual and groups interests connect with and/or undercut those traditionally assumed to be representative of the national good. The need to jettison not only political and cultural elites' claims to represent "the public", but also the rhetoric of disincorporation which entry into the decision-making realm of Canadian public broadcasting demands, is thus justified in part by a reconsideration of the concept, the role and the power of "the audience" and "the public" as theorized by such scholars as Alan Thomas, David Morley, John Hartley, Jay Blumler, Preben Sepstrup and Ien Ang.

Based on an analysis of these scholars' insights, I suggest that these two conceptual entities, "the public" and "the audience", must be understood and served as different, yet counter-cutting forces. As I illustrate, citizens' viewing and interpretive choices as members of the audience should not be subsumed to the nationalist concerns of the public insofar as these individualized acts of consumption counteract the self-stultifying and self-deceiving logic of abstraction required to participate in public decision-making. Conversely, however, a redefined, more inclusive and empowering public should not be

ignored at the expense of the audience insofar as this newly conceived public incites citizens to exercise their democratic opportunity to participate in the process of structuring and restructuring identities and goods. As a result, I conclude that the audience and the public need to be posited not as competing or contradictory theoretical constructs, but rather as endlessly shifting empirical manifestations of a consumer-citizen continuum. I therefore argue that human agents must be understood to be continuously and often simultaneously engaged in the enactment of their identities and interests as both citizens and consumers.

Chapter 4 thus closes with the recognition of the need to overcome the counterproductive audience-public and citizen-consumer dichotomy underlying public broadcasting decision-making. In the end, the ideal of democratic communication inherent in public broadcasting must be freed from this stifling insistence on a sharp separation between the public and private realms:

...not because it guarantees both a consensus and 'good' decisions, but because it provides citizens who are affected by certain decisions with the possibility of reconsidering their judgements about the quality and unintended consequences of these decisions...<sup>27</sup>.

It also heightens awareness and questioning of the hierarchy and irreversibility of some decision-making processes. These discursive opportunities can lead in turn to the development of the communicative ethics required to facilitate and foster open conversation and debate in all spheres of communal life.

The communicative ethics I propose is premised on the respect and integration of four principles: pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability. These principles which I argue should fuel public broadcasting decision-making are not skills to be honed in order to transform human agents as citizens and consumers into more rational and effective debaters. Rather, I contend that these ethical principles should be espoused because they are likely to increase the complex levels of freedom and equality of all public sphere participants. However, this discursive ethics can only become widely recognized and endorsed by public sphere deliberants if traditional broadcasting dichotomies are reconsidered and then understood to be not competing, but counter-cutting forces to be served.

In Chapter 5, I explore and critique the assumption which has fuelled many public broadcasters' relationship with their respective citizens, namely, that the latter's role should be limited to mere autonomous opinion-formation rather than to authoritative decision-making with regards to policies and programming. To this end, I demonstrate how public broadcasters have shared the third problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the public sphere - that a sharp separation between civil society and the state must be maintained to ensure the autonomy of public opinion and to safeguard the possibility of a critical evaluation of government. In particular, I consider how public broadcasters' attempts to maintain an arm's length stance from the State under the guise of corporate independence and media professionalism

have reinforced the rift between public broadcasters and civil society. Moreover, I demonstrate that, contrary to its stated intent, the emphasis on the professionalization of journalism results in a closer rapport with, not greater independence from, the State.

I thus argue that public broadcasters must be prepared to share decision-making responsibilities with citizens if they are to realize the ideal of democratic communication implicit in their mandate and contribute to the legitimization of a revitalized public sphere. I readily acknowledge that walking this tightrope between citizen participation and state independence is no easy task; in fact, it is fraught with perils. Nevertheless, I contend that while this arm's length stance has been a fundamental tenet of many public broadcasters' creed, the need to develop a certain degree of mutual accountability between public broadcasters and the citizens they purport to serve - a need which could temporarily jeopardize public broadcasters' presumed independence from state intervention - is an even more urgent task and thus justifies the risk.

To effectively argue that public broadcasters must implicate more directly and be accountable to citizens, I begin by invoking the definitions of freedom and equality developed in Chapter 3. When the definition of freedom with respect to public broadcasting decision-making is expanded to include not only the freedom to choose between predetermined policies and programs, but the freedom to determine the policies and programs themselves, then mutual accountability becomes not only desirable, but a crucial component of the



public broadcaster - citizen relationship. Participation in the processes of determining both the purpose and the nature of discussions in the discursive arena that is public broadcasting thus becomes each citizen's right and responsibility. Ideally, this responsibility to participate in public broadcasters' decision-making activities should not be regarded by citizens as a burden, but rather as a long overdue invitation insofar as it provides "...an increase in the variety of social and political spheres in which different groups of citizens could participate *if and when they so wish*"<sup>28</sup>.

While I understand that such a reciprocal relationship between public broadcasters and their respective citizens may seem unwieldy at best and utopic at worst, I contend that it provides the only means of overcoming the limitations of a public broadcasting system fashioned either by market logic or state imperatives. As I illustrate, both these options curtail citizens' role to that of exercising negative freedom and thus limit the possibility of meaningful human action. I therefore argue that neither wilful submission to market logic nor unconditional subservience to state imperatives should, in and of themselves, dictate public broadcasting decision-making. I espouse this position because both the market and the state - when allowed to act unhampered by the other - serve to reinforce the status quo and to naturalize dominant biases with regards to the types and purposes of public broadcasting programming that are championed. Clearly, such a practice both undermines and contradicts the ideal of democratic communication underlying public

broadcasting.

Having said this, the impediments posed to the goods espoused by the market by the goods espoused by the state and vice-versa, are shown to be essential, counter-cutting forces to the disequilibrating tendencies displayed by either the market or the state when their powers are unlimited or unregulated. As a result, I conclude that neither force should be subsumed, but rather that the tension between the respective goods privileged by the market and the state must be heightened. In my opinion, these tensions are best heightened in a society whose main tenet is democratic participation. Such a society would limit the "moral vulnerability to the micro-order that emerges from market considerations"<sup>29</sup> and would transform the state from "un état protecteur" to "un état cataliseur"<sup>30</sup>.

For public broadcasting to contribute to the realization of such a society, I argue that it must move beyond a mode of cooperation based either on tradition and centralized command, or subservience to market pressures. It must lead by example, demonstrating that it is committed to the ideal of democratic communication both in its internal structures as well as in its relations with the State. Significantly, such a move need not subject all public broadcasting activities and administration to "the often unwieldy and time-consuming process of direct democracy"<sup>31</sup>, nor need it signal the elimination of all forms of media of representation. However, it does require new forms of self-management, intra-public coordination and public accountability which not

only allow but encourage citizens *who so wish* to participate more actively in both the production and administration of public broadcasting programming.

Chapters 3-5 thus demonstrate how the problematic assumptions implicit in Habermas' vision of the public sphere also underlie traditional understanding and administration of public broadcasting. The critique of these assumptions to indicate how public broadcasting can more fully realize its ideal of democratic communication lays, in turn, the groundwork for Chapter 6. In Chapter 6, I focus on a case study which poignantly illustrates both the perils of uncritically internalizing these assumptions and the radical possibilities that a revised interpretation of the role of public broadcasting and the public sphere present. The case study in question involves the city of Windsor, (Ontario) which has a population of approximately 250,000 residents. As will be explained, on 6 December 1990, local CBC programming in Windsor was abruptly cancelled as a result of one of the deepest rounds of public broadcasting cuts in CBC history<sup>32</sup>.

Significantly, Windsor residents did not accept the CBC's decision to eliminate their local news without a concerted and vocal fight. Rather than disgruntledly, yet quietly, acquiescing to the decision handed down from Ottawa, Windsor residents signed petitions, launched a court challenge, marched in the streets, appeared before the CRTC and struck a committee that investigated innovative means of providing local news, ranging from a CBC employee buy-out of the station to a strategic alliance with the provincial public

broadcaster TVO. Yet rather than work with the local Windsor team to find a solution that would be acceptable to all parties, the CBC brass chose to forego a rare opportunity to redefine its relationship with, and responsibilities to, Canadian citizens. Despite this strategic error, after nearly four years of sustained political and public pressure, local CBC evening news in Windsor was finally reinstated on 4 October 1994.

Why was this case study chosen from amongst the myriad of potential contenders? First, it searingly demonstrates the harm that can be done to a spirited community, to support for national public broadcasting and to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication itself, when the problematic assumptions discussed in chapters 3-5 are allowed to dictate public broadcasting decision-making. Second, this case study provides an opportunity to further explore, in a particular historical and cultural context, the tensions implicit in the local - global, citizen - consumer and opinion-generating - decision-making continuums with which the CBC and Canadian citizens must continuously wrestle. Third, Windsor residents' attempts to reinvent their relationship with the national public broadcaster by redefining their role in the provision of local news, highlights practical and pertinent ways in which local communities can contribute to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public broadcasting.

To this end, I begin by historically contextualizing the role that television has played in the Windsor area since its inception in 1952. I document the

station's transition from private to public ownership; its challenging relationship with regional and national components of the CBC; and its contribution to the Windsor community. I then consider the tensions underlying conceptions and expectations of local, regional and national CBC news programming as understood from the perspective of the citizens of Windsor. In particular, I argue that many Windsor residents understood that the emancipatory potential of CBET local news resided in its simultaneous ability to contribute to their formation of discursive opinions and their enactment of social identities. Moreover, I demonstrate that, as Windsor viewers anticipated, they could not clarify their personal and/or collective interests while viewing the ill-conceived "regional" news program expected to replace their local news, because their interests and identities were arbitrarily and artificially excluded from these programs.

In addition, I explain how and why CBC management attempted to predetermine the common good by deciding - without consulting Canadian citizens - that national public broadcasting's core would be preserved at the expense of what was deemed peripheral, and ultimately disposable, local programming. I analyze Windsor residents' response to this decision both as members of "the audience" and of "the public" and suggests how these responses function as political and social expressions of their communication entitlements as citizens and consumers. Moreover, I examine the implications of the documented paradox of Canadian public broadcasting - that "the public"

is so vociferously in support of Canadian programming while "the audience" continues to consume American programming in droves - as it acutely manifested itself in Windsor, both before and after the decision to eliminate CBET local news.

Finally, I evaluate Windsor residents' attempts to assume a decision-making role in the provision of local CBC news. In particular, I contest the reasons the CBC provided for its reticence to reconceive its relationship with the Windsor television viewing community, especially in light of the CBC's incapacity to fulfil Windsor residents' public programming needs. I also note with irony that while border communities such as Windsor are often criticized for nurturing the most Americanized Canadians, Windsor residents' determination to find a solution to the CBC's impasse was indicative of their genuinely enthusiastic support for Canadian public service media. I thus conclude that the CBC's failure to capitalize on Windsor's willingness to share in decision-making responsibilities with regards to local programming, is further testament to its inability to relinquish its paternalistic and hierarchical control of the modes of production and distribution of public broadcasting.

What contribution does my thesis make to our understanding of the constitutive components of a revitalized theory and ideal of the public sphere? How might our collective understanding of the purpose and pertinence of public broadcasting both in Canada and the world be heightened by my analysis? What does my work tell us about the correlations amongst public service

media, the creation of an active citizenry and the promulgation of democracy? It is to these questions that I turn my attention in the next and final chapter.

As I explain in Chapter 7, in choosing to analyze the three problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere, their implications for public broadcasting and their application to the Windsor case study, I seek first to justify my argument that the guiding ideal underlying public broadcasting is, in fact, that of democratic communication. In addition, I want to better understand and relate both the conditions which would lead to, and the consequences which would result from, the realization of this ideal. Why is the recovery of the ideal of democratic communication a crucial task? Primarily, it is to reclaim the ideal from the hands of those who have coopted it to define and defend broadcasting policies and programming which run contrary to public broadcasting's fundamental purpose - to defend and promote not consensus, nor collective consciousness, but the openness of human communication.

As I demonstrate in my analysis, public broadcasters' espousal of a philosophy of centralization and bureaucratization; nationalists' cooption of public broadcasting to promote and protect national unity and a collective consciousness; journalists' ensconcement in their professional creed; and private broadcasters' trumpeting of the free market and consumer "choice" ideology, have subsumed the ideal, all the while axiomatically calling upon the values implicit in it to justify their respective positions. As a result of this

cooption, "...the ideal sinks to the level of an axiom - something one doesn't challenge, but also never expounds"<sup>33</sup>. While this ideal may be degraded thereby having a negative influence on the nature and function of public broadcasting, the ideal of democratic communication is not only worthwhile, but even irrepressible if people wish to live in a society which boasts an active and informed citizenry and is a participatory democracy not only in name, but in essence.

In seeking to recover an ideal which promotes a radical redefinition of both public broadcasting conversations and the organization of them, I am not eschewing the possibility that public broadcasting may contribute to consensus or societal integration. I do contend, however, that all citizens both deserve and benefit from the opportunity to stretch the limits of their imaginations in order to envisage innovative and unanticipated discursive, political, economic and cultural means of redefining their own identities and their relationships with others. Yet contrary to the expectation that "our uncertainties will be reduced by access to through-worlds constructed along lines alternative to our own, they will, in fact, be multiplied"<sup>34</sup>. As a result, public broadcasting's willingness and ability to contribute to opening up the range and hierarchy of public conversations can only be achieved at the expense of both the broadcasters' and citizens' inward ease.

It is for this reason then, that I argue that the possibility of participating in public broadcasting decision-making processes, of sustaining reasonable



levels of mutual accountability and of ensuring responsiveness to citizens' questions and recommendations is vitally important. Yet should this accountability, cooperation and participation be limited to the enclave of public broadcasting, its potential contribution to the revitalization of the public sphere is severely hampered, if not rendered completely meaningless. The democratization of all public service media must be accompanied by a similar democratization of government institutions because the creation of an active citizenry necessitates access to the channels of influence and power. As Groombridge reminds: "...information does not motivate people to action if they do not feel that they have an entrée to influence and power"<sup>35</sup>. As a result, no direct causal link can be made, in and of itself, between the democratization of public broadcasting and the creation of an active polity.

Furthermore, rendering public broadcasting more accessible to citizens who wish to participate in both the process and the practice of mass mediated public communication cannot guarantee that all or even most citizens will choose to do so. To make this assumption would be to forget that the definition of freedom underlying my entire discussion of the role of public broadcasting and the public sphere is one which includes both the freedom to choose *not* to participate and the freedom to delegate these rights and responsibilities to a third party. As John Keane is quick to point out: "In spite of its fundamental importance, liberty of communication is one of a great diversity of liberties, whose significance for different categories of citizens is

inescapably variable and subject to continuous modification"<sup>36</sup>.

Keeping in mind this caveat, it *is* possible to argue effectively that the creation of an active citizenry is negatively affected by a public broadcasting system that limits citizens' freedom by curtailing their discursive opportunities for decision-making and identity formation. Therefore, while public broadcasters cannot be held accountable for ensuring that in all instances and situations the ideal of democratic communication is realized, public service media can and should provide, within the confines of its jurisdiction, the optimum environment and enticement for the realization of the ideal at the hands of an active citizenry. It is in this sense that public service media's ability to realize its own ideal of democratic communication could become an indispensable catalyst for the revitalization of the public sphere.

## END NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

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3. Newton Minow in Avery, op.cit., p. xi.
4. Trine Syvertsen, "Public Television in Crisis: Critiques Compared in Norway and Britain" in European Journal of Communication, Vol. 6(1), 1991, p. 112.
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9. Stig Hjarvard, "Pan-European Television News: Towards a European Political Public Sphere?" in National Identity in Europe: The Television Revolution, Phillip Drummond, Richard Paterson and Janet Willis (eds.), (London: British Film Institute), 1993, p. 72.
10. Ibid., p. 72.
11. This definition of "crisis" can be found in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1983.
12. Ibid.
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22. John Keane, Democracy and Civil Society, (London: Verso), 1988, p. 130.
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24. Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, (California: Stanford University Press), 1990, pp. 16-17.
25. Ibid., p. 88. Access points are defined by Giddens as "points of connection between laypersons and groups and representatives of abstract systems".
26. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
27. John Keane, Democracy and the Media, op.cit., p. 179.

28. John Keane, Democracy and Civil Society, op.cit., p. 14.
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35. Groombridge as quoted by David Morley in "The construction of everyday life: political communication and domestic media", Television Audiences and Cultural Studies. (Routledge: London), 1992, p. 253.
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## REVISITING HABERMAS' IDEAL PUBLIC SPHERE

In light of the proliferation of recent books and articles which have addressed, attacked, borrowed or bludgeoned, the concept of the public sphere, it might easily be argued that both the concept and its critique have grown stale; that this term and its referents have outlived their usefulness to critical thinking. Yet rather than take this tack, this chapter directly confronts and challenges such thinking. As does Peter Dahlgren, I contend that it would be a grave error to allow the concept of the public sphere to:

...become a flat referent, reduced to merely signifying what is, losing sight of what should and could be. The critical dimension...ideally serves to scramble the existing demarcations between the manifest and the latent, between what is and what might be, such that the lines might be redrawn in a way which could take us closer to a more democratic society<sup>1</sup>.

The fact that the traditional concept and/or critique of the public sphere may be problematic or may, upon initial inspection, not resonate forcefully with contemporary questions or conditions, is no reason to abandon creative and comparative attempts to revitalize both the concept and its emancipatory potential. To leave the public sphere for dead, would be to fail to recognize that the public sphere as manifested in its institutions, impulses and ideals is continuously being reevaluated and remodelled. The self-reflexive, unpredictable nature of both the public sphere and its critics, therefore justifies

continued attempts to grapple with the questions and issues its definitions and usages raise.

In keeping with this reasoning, the chapter will begin with a recapitulation of the Habermasian theory of the public sphere as detailed in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. To set the stage for the subsequent consideration of three problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' theory, I will briefly review Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere, together with the conditions which he suggests led to its rise and fall. I will also describe the "refeudalization" of the public sphere as documented by Habermas and indicate the conditions which he believes could lead to the revitalization of the public sphere today.

Having reiterated the key components of Habermas' theory, I will identify and analyze three problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere. The first problematic assumption I will address is that Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere is based on a pure liberal notion of freedom as freedom from coercion. Second, I will contest the assumption that the ideal public sphere necessitates a clear separation of private and public realms. And third, I will dispute Habermas' claim that the ideal public sphere depends upon a sharp separation between civil society and the state. The critique of these three problematic assumptions will highlight Habermas' tendency to assume the rationality and intelligibility of the output of public sphere deliberations. As I will illustrate, in his consideration of the

early bourgeois public sphere, Habermas fails to fully problematize the social obstacles to the production and reception of critical publicity. As a result of this oversight, he is unable to account for the changes in the production and reception of rational critical debate that the advent of the mass media entails, except in negative terms. The end result of my critique will thus be to establish new conditions and assumptions which should fuel the revitalization of both the public sphere and its key arenas of discursive interaction, of which the media, and more particularly, public broadcasting, should arguably be one.

#### The Habermasian concept of the public sphere

What is Habermas' conception of the public sphere? In perhaps the simplest of terms, the public sphere is posited as a communal space - communal both in the sense that it belongs to the community as a whole and that it is a space in which the community comes together to participate in the discussion of issues which are of common concern. More specifically, the public sphere is conceptualized as a realm or an arena in which private individuals engage in discursive interaction, that is to say, a place in which individuals meet to exchange ideas and opinions. This arena is further qualified as a realm that is "free from both the cares of private life and the violence of state power"<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, it is said to be conceptually distinct from both the official economy and state activity. Moreover, in its political as opposed to literary variant, the public sphere is "a space in which the state and its representatives are held accountable to its citizenry"<sup>3</sup>. It is thus a space in



which rational justifications of thought and action are not only expected, but demanded. Arguably, the public sphere is also the "prime institution for the construction of consent"<sup>4</sup> since debate and the subsequent decisions taken in this communal space provide the justification for, and legitimation of, political action.

Most significantly, the public sphere as conceived by Habermas is not an empirical reality that can be scientifically reproduced in any society irrespective of its particular material or historical conditions. Rather, it is a guiding ideal.

As Nicholas Garnham explains in "The Media and the Public Sphere:

...for Habermas, the essential human attribute of speech provides the ground for an ideal society against which existing societies can be judged and found wanting and to which we can aspire. Thus the concept of the Public Sphere and the principles it embodies represent an Ideal Type against which we can judge existing social arrangements and which we can attempt to embody in concrete institutions in the light of reigning historical circumstances<sup>5</sup>.

The public sphere in Habermas' idealized formulation is thus a discursive arena - free of government and market intervention - in which all citizens engage as equals in rational debate about the common good in order to achieve democratic consensus and action.

However, this ideal type runs the risk of becoming too firmly entrenched in specific historical and material conditions due to Habermas' implicit theoretical link between the ideal public sphere *per se* and the ideal *bourgeois* public sphere. As Robert Holub observes, in Habermas' analysis of the

structural transformation of the public sphere there is a constant oscillation between normative concepts and historical accounts which suggest that "no matter where we locate the public sphere historically, it seems certain that the bourgeois ideal must possess normative value for all notions of the public sphere"<sup>6</sup>. A brief review of Habermas' account of the structural transformation of the public sphere which he documents in terms of the "rise and fall" of the *bourgeois* public sphere will lend credence to this contention.

In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas traces the concurrent rise of consumer capitalism, liberal pluralism and scientific rationalism which created the preconditions for the emergence of a bourgeois middle class and thus a bourgeois public sphere. Defined as "the sphere of private people come together as a public"<sup>7</sup>, this early bourgeois public sphere as described by Habermas is literary, rather than political, in nature. Institutionalized in coffee houses in London, salons in France, table societies in Germany and more generally, in the patriarchal family unit, these literary public spheres are said to have provided the training ground for "political confrontation [that] was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason"<sup>8</sup>. The apex of these literary public spheres, according to Habermas' account, is the mid-eighteenth century<sup>9</sup>.

Having considered its literary precursor, Habermas then turns his attention to the rise of political public spheres which are central to his ideal conception. According to Habermas, the first political public sphere arose in

Great Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century<sup>10</sup>. In France, a public that critically debated political issues found its voice in the middle of the eighteenth century; its critical impulses were institutionalized in the Revolution of 1789<sup>11</sup>. By the mid-nineteenth century, the ideal version of the bourgeois public sphere as conceived by Habermas would have functioned as follows:

...the marketplace would make available politically relevant information in the form of news, ideas, discussion, policy debates and so on. The output would originate from among the citizens themselves, since access was seen as integral to the liberal ideal...The public on encountering this output would reflect on it through discussion. This would give rise to opinion and the formation of political will. Finally, the arrived-at views would become articulated throughout the public sphere, preparatory to political action and through the official mechanisms and the next phase of social dialogue<sup>12</sup>.

As Habermas explains, the structure and the purpose of this public sphere "was safeguarded whenever the economic and social conditions gave everyone equal chance to meet the criteria for admission"<sup>13</sup>. Both the historical bourgeois public sphere and Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere then, are premised on the organizing goal of pure liberalism -the protection and promotion of negative freedom.

Given the emphasis on protecting individual freedom from coercion on which Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere rests, it is not surprising that he perceives the overly extended intrusion of the state into the private lives of individuals as tantamount to disaster for the realization of his democratic ideal. Hence, in tracing the fall or "refeudalization" of the public

sphere, Habermas points to the paradoxical tendency toward "a mutual infiltration of public and private spheres"<sup>14</sup> and "the polarization of the social sphere and the intimate sphere"<sup>15</sup>. In the first instance, "this dialectic of a progressive 'societalization' of the state simultaneously with an increasing stratification of society" is said to have "gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere - the separation of state and society"<sup>16</sup>. In the second instance, "the shrinking of the private sphere into the inner areas of a conjugal family largely relieved of functions and weakened in authority"<sup>17</sup> is said to have led to the transition from "a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public"<sup>18</sup>. This new public is distinguished from the previous by its marked abstinence from literary and political debates which unravels "the web of public communication...into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode"<sup>19</sup>.

Habermas thus argues that in the excessive intermingling of society and state, people have been largely relieved of their ability to publicly exercise their reason. According to Habermas, this role has been assumed by political parties and special interest associations which, with the help of public relations and the mass media, have transformed the public sphere into "the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed, rather than *in* which public critical debate is carried on"<sup>20</sup>. As a result, Habermas contends that the public sphere has been refeudalized because publicity as generated by political parties and special interest groups "imitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and

supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity involved in [feudal] representation"<sup>21</sup>.

Yet contrary to what might be expected given Habermas' implicit link between the bourgeois public sphere and the ideal public sphere *per se*, he does not exclude the possibility that a viable public sphere could be reconstituted today. As if to reestablish the link between the bourgeois public and the twentieth century public, Habermas points to the fact that voter participation today is highest among those who, like their bourgeois counterparts, are involved in the social conditions of production and are members of private associations<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, he argues that insofar as the social welfare-state "preserves the continuity with the liberal constitutional state" which underlies the bourgeois ideal, "it clings to the mandate of a political public sphere"<sup>23</sup>.

While acknowledging these residues of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas contends that a viable public sphere could only be revived today if there was a rational reorganization of "...societal and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations themselves committed to publicity as regards both their internal structure and their interaction with one another and with the state"<sup>24</sup>. This democratization of political parties, special interest associations and the mass media, as well as the formalized links amongst them, echoes the rallying cry of the "long march through institutions" prevalent in the 1960s<sup>25</sup>. The end result of these central institutions' exposure to critical publicity and to a democratization process, Habermas claims, would be that "a

no longer intact public of private people dealing with each other individually would be replaced by a public of organized private people"<sup>26</sup>. Only in this way could the ideal underlying the bourgeois public sphere be revitalized and realized in the public sphere today.

First problematic assumption: Can and should status differentials be bracketed?

In addressing the issue of equality in the burgeoning institutions of the literary public sphere, Habermas notes that "the decisive element was not so much the political equality of the members, but their exclusiveness in relation to the political realm of absolutism as such: social equality was possible at first only as an equality outside the state"<sup>27</sup>. By way of example, Habermas points to early seventeenth century German table societies in which the bourgeoisie and uninfluential nobles, both politically disenfranchised groups, met to deliberate as "common" human beings<sup>28</sup>. As Habermas explains, this tendency "to preserve a kind of social intercourse, that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether"<sup>29</sup> was in fact a key criterion in salons', coffee houses' and table societies' recognition as public spheres. This bracketing of social status was achieved both by deliberants' wilful submission to the power of the best argument and by an artificial suspension of the laws of the market and of the State<sup>30</sup>. A deliberant's ability to be credited with the best argument, irrespective of his position in the social hierarchy, was thus considered a victory for both the power of rational

argumentation and human equality. While Habermas acknowledges that this bracketing of status to deliberate as equals was not fully realized in the salons, coffee houses and table societies, the mere fact that it was institutionalized as an idea is, in his opinion, consequential for his conception of the ideal public sphere<sup>31</sup>.

Insofar as the political variant of the bourgeois public sphere is concerned, the conception of equality was structurally embodied in the free market system. Posited as an autonomous, anonymous and thus "objective" system, the free market was trumpeted as the best means to promote exchanges in an arena which protected individual freedom from coercion<sup>32</sup>. As Habermas explains, "the public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access"<sup>33</sup>. Equality in the political public sphere thus meant an equal opportunity to compete within the free market system for access to "the qualifications for private autonomy that made for the educated and property owning person"<sup>34</sup> admitted to public sphere deliberations. In keeping with this logic, Habermas contends that the development of the free market "completed the privatization of civil society"<sup>35</sup> and "emancipated it from the directives of public authority to such an extent that at the time, the political public sphere could attain its full development in the bourgeois constitutional state"<sup>36</sup>. The period of capitalist free trade - "the one blissful moment in the long history of capitalist development"<sup>37</sup> - is therefore hailed by Habermas as having provided the socio-economic conditions required for the

quasi-attainment of both the bourgeois and his own ideal political public sphere.

However, the problem with both the literary and political variants of the bourgeois public sphere, as Habermas himself concedes, is that despite their institutionalized intent to bracket status differentials and to provide (by means of a free market) opportunities for access to the deliberations, the traditional bourgeois public sphere remained almost exclusively the property of white, middle to upper class males. As Margaret C. Jacob explains in "The Mental Landscape of the Public Sphere: A European Perspective", although both men and women who were highly literate and who exercised some influence could potentially participate in these public sphere deliberations, the fact remained that:

...large numbers of the literate were excluded from effective membership in civil society because money was required for membership in salons, societies and lodges and attendance at theatres, if not money for initiation or entrance fees, then for dress, for the learning of decorum, for gifts given, books purchased, for commodities as necessary but expensive as fine paper, good quills and stamps<sup>38</sup>.

Unfortunately then, those who had the potential to contribute meaningfully to public sphere deliberations were often excluded due to their inability to access the capital required to ensure their full and equal representation in civil society circles.

Moreover, even if we accept Habermas' premise that had the free market system remained unhampered by government intervention, the systematic inequalities based on gender, class, race and sexual orientation could have



been, and in fact, have been largely eliminated, there still remains a fundamentally unresolved issue. As Nancy Fraser rightly asks in "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy": "Is it possible and/or desirable to bracket status differentials to deliberate as if we are social equals?"<sup>39</sup> As Fraser explains, even if formal exclusions from the public sphere are eliminated, "informal impediments to participatory parity can persist even after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate"<sup>40</sup>.

The assumption that it is both *possible* and *desirable* to bracket status differentials is profoundly problematic because it confounds volitional and voluntary freedom and it assumes equality of negative freedom where none exists. Stated otherwise, this pure liberal conception of accessibility to, and equality within the public sphere, does not account for the inevitable distinctions between the varying levels of freedom exercised by all interlocutors, even when their presence in the public sphere has been officially recognized and legitimized. Those participants who benefit from the coercive advantage in the public sphere exercise voluntary freedom, that is to say, they have the opportunity or the capacity to determine the conditions, rules and purposes of the debates themselves. In contrast, those participants who are subjected to the coercive power have circumscribed freedom. They exercise only volitional freedom; the freedom to speak in accordance with pre-determined rules, conditions and agreed upon purposes, rather than the

freedom to determine the conditions, rules and purposes of the debates themselves.

The obfuscation that results from the pure liberal conception of freedom underlying traditional assumptions about the public sphere is thus the failure to recognize that the public sphere, constituted as a marketplace of ideas, is subject to the same structural limitations as the economic and judicial systems. As Warren J. Samuels explains in "Interrelations Between Legal and Economic Processes", every market transaction involves a redistribution of rights and a decision as to who will be exposed to the coercive power<sup>41</sup>. Similarly, in the public sphere, every *discursive* transaction involves a redistribution of rights and a decision as to who will be exposed to the coercive force. Or as Miriam Hansen argues:

In its abstractedness, this principle of generality (the bracketing of social status and special interests) is no more human or democratic - and no less violent - than the universalizing tendency of the liberal-capitalist market that it presumes to set aside. Thus, from its inception the bourgeois public's claim to represent a general will functions as a powerful mechanism of exclusion: the exclusion of substantial social groups such as workers, women and servants as well as vital social issues such as the material conditions of production and reproduction... - the exclusion of any difference that cannot be assimilated, rationalized or subsumed<sup>42</sup>.

As a result, rather than naturalize these exclusionary impulses, the dominant coercive forces must be exposed and the subsequent distinction between those who exercise volitional freedom as opposed to those who exercise voluntary freedom must be directly addressed.

Having made this distinction, it is important to note that the motive for problematizing the assumption that it is possible to bracket status differentials in public sphere deliberations is not to conclude that the theory of the public sphere is untenable on this basis. As Paddy Scannell explains, to say that this inequality squashes any possibility of a viable public sphere is delusory:

For all its seeming sophistication the Theory of Ideology says something very simple indeed...The media are harmful and the function of literary criticism or theoretical critique is to expose them in that light. Such an approach is not reconcilable with any view of the public sphere that works to enhance the reasonable, democratic character of life in public and private contexts<sup>43</sup>.

The purpose then is not to deny the possibility for meaningful discursive interaction on the grounds that it is impossible to eliminate all hegemonic influences given that in any discursive context both the deliberations and the decisions necessarily expose some individuals to coercive force and thus limit their voluntary freedom. Rather, the goal is to determine the means by which the social inequalities which sustain these imbalances of voluntary freedom can be if not subsumed, at least problematized and denaturalized in order to enable disadvantaged groups to legitimately compete for opportunities to exercise the coercive advantage and thus, more voluntary freedom.

The most common way that critics have contested the emphasis on negative freedom underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere is by pointing to his failure to acknowledge or analyze the emancipatory potential of counter-publics or counter-public spheres. For instance, in

"Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", Nancy Fraser drawing on a study by Mary Ryan argues that from the earliest incorporation of the bourgeois public sphere, there were a multiplicity of publics, which while not officially recognize through universal suffrage, were vibrant and viable arenas of discursive interaction. According to Fraser, Habermas' failure to account for these nationalist, popular peasant and working class publics stems directly from his acceptance and his rationalization of the bourgeois public's ideological claim to be the public. In contrast with Habermas' tendency to define the public sphere as a singular, overarching sphere for which individuals compete for access, Fraser thus posits a multiplicity of competing publics.

Similarly, Peter Dahlgren has recently written of a new "two-tiered public sphere, where the alternative movement media, with their stronger link to the experiences and interpretations of the everyday lives of their members, have a growing political capacity to transmit their versions of political reality to the dominant media"<sup>44</sup>. Significantly, in defining these counter-publics and counter-public spheres both in the bourgeois and the contemporary era, Fraser and Dahlgren are quick to point out that these discursive spaces are not conceived as enclaves which are separatist in nature. Insofar as these counter-publics recognize that their deliberations and the publicity which results from them, imply a larger public, often referred to as 'the public-at-large', they are implicitly inclusive<sup>45</sup>.

To this end, critics such as Miriam Hansen have argued that this implicit publicness may well be the determining factor that distinguishes counter-publics and counter-public spheres from becoming more partial, "non-public" publics. As Hansen notes:

What partial publics have in common is that they operate through industrial commercial venues, that they organize vast constituencies (in the case of some electronic churches, whole subsystems); but that their activities tend to remain more or less (in the case of sports, certainly less) hidden from public view. This compartmentalization of issues and constituencies may be one of the markers, tentatively that distinguish partial publics from counterpublics<sup>46</sup>.

Such a distinction between partial publics and counter-publics does not negate, however, the possibility that the former could link up with the latter to heighten counter-publics' ability to contest coercive or exclusionary measures within the public sphere. Nevertheless, the emancipatory potential of counter-public spheres (as opposed to non-public, partial publics) resides in their simultaneous ability to contribute to counter-publics' formation of discursive opinion and their formation and enactment of social identities. As Fraser argues, as "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" and as "training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics", these counter-publics "partially offset, although not wholly eradicate, the unjust participatory privilege enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies"<sup>47</sup>.

Bruce Robbins concurs with Fraser when he notes that Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in positing a proletarian counter-public sphere opposite the

bourgeois variant, "stress a site of interaction and continuing self-formation rather than a given or self-sufficient body of ideas and practices distinguishing one group from others"<sup>48</sup>. As Robbins points out, the notion of the public sphere in all its variants, thus "...invokes identity but does so with more emphasis on actions and their consequences than on the nature or characteristics of the actors"<sup>49</sup>. To Robbins' observations, Miriam Hansen adds that the notion of a counter-public as defined by Negt and Kluge "offers forms of solidarity and reciprocity that are grounded in a collective experience of marginalization and expropriation"<sup>50</sup>. Significantly, however, "these forms are inevitably experienced as mediated and subject to discursive conflict and negotiation"<sup>51</sup>. It is salient to remember, therefore, that "the admission of discursive struggle into the process of subordinate groups...is the condition of the possibility for different counterpublics to overlap and form alliances"<sup>52</sup>.

Consequently, while insisting on the democratic potential of a multiplicity of competing publics, these theorists neither ignore nor negate the need for an integrative public sphere. For example, in arguing that public life in pluralistic societies such as ours cannot be exercised in a single, comprehensive public sphere, Fraser nevertheless asserts that this "need not preclude the possibility of an additional, more comprehensive arena in which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity"<sup>53</sup>. This conclusion is increasingly echoed by other scholars such as Rita Felski, who in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, states that "the present status and influence of the

women's movement cannot be adequately accounted for by the notion of a unified and autonomous counter-public sphere which remains separate from the rest of society"<sup>54</sup>. Likewise, in "Unifying Discourse: City College as a Post-Modern Public Sphere", Patricia Mann, far from negating the need for an integrative public sphere, argues that the unifying discourse which results from such meetings of counter-publics is crucial to overcome oppositional discourses' growing inability to effectively respond to the liberal pluralist discourse<sup>55</sup>.

Yet as we shall see in our consideration of the second problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere, the challenge remains how to posit this integrative public sphere in such a way that it does not reproduce the assimilating and hegemonic tendencies of the traditional bourgeois public sphere. Mann's solution to this dilemma is to make the mandate of the integrative public sphere the formulation of a unifying discourse even if "this shared conception and shared institutional purpose must obviously be artificially created"<sup>56</sup>. However, far from being a viable alternative, Mann's response indicates the theoretical ease with which Habermas' critics might unwittingly suggest a return to the homogenizing tendencies of his ideal public sphere.

The predetermination of the common good and the naturalization of the 'public' and 'private' realms

The second problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere is the assumption that discursive interaction in the public sphere should be "restricted to deliberations about the common good and that the appearance of 'private interests' or 'private issues' is always undesirable"<sup>57</sup>. Stated otherwise, Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere rests on a complete separation of private and public realms of being. The official rationale for the exclusion of private interests from the bourgeois public sphere was that property owners would forego their individual interests in order to debate matters of public concern, and thus achieve a consensus on public goods. As Habermas explains, the conflation of these private individuals' roles as both property owners (bourgeois) and human beings pure and simple (homme) was "facilitated above all by the fact that it actually had positive functions in the context of the political emancipation of civil society from mercantilist rule and from absolutistic regimentation"<sup>58</sup>. In this sense then, the interests of the property owners were said to converge with that of the freedom of the individual in general.

While noting this potential convergence of goals around the issue of freedom, Habermas readily recognizes that a fundamental ideological obfuscation of "bourgeois" with "homme" was required to sustain this fiction in the bourgeois public sphere. Significantly, however, his interpretation of the consequence of the dialectic of Marx's and Hegel's critique, which revealed the



equation of property owners with human beings to be untenable, only reinforces Habermas' detractors' belief that his conception of the ideal public sphere is based on the same faulty conflation as the bourgeois model. For instance, there is little doubt that in suggesting that as a result of this inherent dialectic, "this public sphere would come under the control of groups that, because they lacked control over property and therefore a basis of private autonomy, could have no interest in maintaining society as a private sphere"<sup>59</sup>, Habermas is lamenting the loss of a fundamental characteristic of both the bourgeois, and his own, ideal public sphere.

However, Habermas' insistence on this clear separation of private and public realms, with its accompanying necessity for deliberants to consider only matters of common good is problematic for several reasons. First, contrary to its stated intent to exorcise private concerns and interests from the public debate, this qualification of the public sphere achieves no such goal. Rather, the internalization of this assumption by participants in the public sphere serves both to naturalize the dominant group's definitions of private and public realms and to delimit *a priori* the conceptual boundaries of public goods. The end result of this naturalization process is to eliminate the grounds on which terms such as "private", "public" and "common good" can be contested. As Nicholas Garnham argues:

To the extent that it was able to operate on the basis of consensus as to the public good it was not because the Public Sphere had escaped determination by the private interests that ruled civil society, but because the

bourgeoisie who participated in the Public Sphere did so on the basis of a tacit prior acceptance of bourgeois class interests as coterminous with the public good and as not themselves open to the scrutiny of public rational argument that was supposed to rule within the Public Sphere<sup>60</sup>.

Had strategic action not been outlawed from the public sphere, the indelible presence of private interests, be they those of the bourgeois class or of other groups might have forced deliberants to redefine or at least acknowledge which were class specific as opposed to potentially common goals and goods.

This artificial distinction between the purified arena of the public sphere and the sullied world of personal or group interest is also untenable because as Michael Warner argues in "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject", the exorcism of one's private interests from public sphere deliberations requires a specific rhetorics of disincorporation which is not an equally available resource.

As Warner explains:

Individuals have to have specific rhetorics of disincorporation; they are not simply rendered bodiless by exercising reason. And it is only possible to operate a discourse based on the claim to self-abstracting disinterestedness in a culture where such unmarked self-abstraction is a differential resource. The subject who could master this rhetoric in the bourgeois public sphere was implicitly, even explicitly white, male, literate and propertied<sup>61</sup>.

As Warner is quick to point out, the inability of marginalized groups such as women to participate fully in the logic of abstraction required for public sphere deliberations in the bourgeois era, was indicative of more than simply residual inequality of access to this good<sup>62</sup>. According to Warner, this inequality is fundamentally rooted in symbolic and cultural definitions of difference which,

in any given civilization, identify some bodies as unmarked or universalizable and others as marked or particular<sup>63</sup>. Insofar as the bourgeois public sphere is concerned, Warner argues that it was "structured from the outset by a logic of abstraction that provides a privilege for unmarked identities: the male, the white, the middle class, the normal"<sup>64</sup>. As Warner indicates, "while these traits could go unmarked, even grammatically, other features of bodies could only be acknowledge in discourse as the humiliating positivity of the particular"<sup>65</sup>.

Warner's argument is supported by Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek in their 1995 article "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric". Although these theorists are particularly concerned with the abstractness of whiteness, their remarks illustrate the ways in which this rhetoric of abstraction simultaneously serves to naturalize unmarked bodies and discourses while highlighting "marked" counterparts in all their humiliating positivity. As Nakayama and Krizek explain:

Within a discursive system of naming oppression, but never the oppressive class, white can only be a negative, and invisible entity. This characteristic of whiteness is unique in its discursive construction and must be understood as a part of its power and force. Its invisibility guarantees its unstratified nature. White, as a subject position, is otherwise unmarked, which feels more appropriate and occupies a more universal discursive space...Whiteness is only marked in reverse<sup>66</sup>.

Discursive arenas which are subject to this logic of abstraction thus reinforce the coercive force and advantage of those bodies and ideas which, in any given

cultural context, are posited as neutral, universalizable, and thus presumably interest-free.

This logic of abstraction which fuels both the bourgeois and Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere cannot be allowed to persist unchallenged in contemporary conceptions of the public sphere not only because it is an unequally available resource, but also because it contributes to self-alienation and fosters self-deception in privileged and minoritized subjects alike. Privileged subjects experience self-alienation insofar as they find themselves "in a relation of bad faith with their own positivity [because] to acknowledge their positivity would be to surrender their privilege"<sup>67</sup>. Or as Nakayama and Krizek note with regards to whiteness as a strategic rhetoric, "Unlike other categories, one can only be white by not being anything else. This negative definition may be related to the invisibility of whiteness as a category or a position from which one speaks"<sup>68</sup>. Minoritized subjects also suffer from self-alienation insofar as they have no public venue into which they can carry or in which they can express their unrecuperated positivity. Notably, even when minoritized subjects' humiliating positivity does manage to cross over into the public realm, these subjects are perpetually caught in a "...struggle over *who* gets to label *whom* in the social construction of identity"<sup>69</sup>. This struggle is one in which unmarked identities clearly have the advantage as their bodies seemingly defy labelling.

In both cases then, the end result is that, forced to adopt a stance which does not allow them to reconcile their individual particularities with notions of human commonality, both privileged and minoritized subjects engage in self-deceptive tactics. As Mette Hjort explains in "Strategies of the Self", self-deception results from:

...a conflict between some aspect of an agent's privileged self-concept, on the one hand, and that same agent's manifest attitudes and/or actions, on the other. The agent is self-deceived because he or she fails to recognize the discrepancies even though there is sufficient evidence to lead to such a realization. The recognition is blocked, however, by an unintentional process by means of which information is filtered and distorted<sup>70</sup>.

The bourgeois conception of the public sphere promotes self-deception in *dominant* groups insofar as it encourages them to adopt a predominantly pragmatic, rationalistic approach to deliberations rather than one grounded primarily in moral or epistemic reasoning. Likewise, the traditional public sphere fosters self-deception in *minority* groups insofar as it forces them to arbitrarily set aside and deny their particularities as a prerequisite for social acceptance into the public sphere.

It is important to note here that in suggesting that this rhetoric of disincorporation is ultimately disempowering even for dominant groups, I am not attempting to negate the power differentials that such a rhetoric establishes between marked and unmarked identities or interests. I do not agree with bell hooks, however, that "to treat whiteness [or in this case bourgeois man] as victimizing to whites [bourgeois men] as well in the hopes that this will act as

an intervention is a misguided strategy"<sup>71</sup>. The point of arguing that such a rhetoric leads to self-deception in all subjects, regardless of their ability to engage in this process of disincorporation, is to emphasize that, in all instances, this self-deception rooted in the logic of abstraction "works against one of the principal aims of deliberation, namely, helping participants to clarify their interests, even when those interests turn out to conflict"<sup>72</sup>.

Clearly, none of the participants in public sphere deliberations, be they privileged or minoritized subjects, can clarify their personal and collective interests if "private interests" are arbitrarily and artificially excluded from the debate. Moreover, as Dana Villa underlines in "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere":

...while it is possible to imagine the realization of the ideal speech situation, this would be nothing more than the achievement of 'pseudo-autonomy in the conditions of pseudosymmetry'...[as this process] leaves unexamined the self-surveillance of the civically virtuous citizen (who has internalized the hegemonic conception of the public good) or communicatively rational agent (who has internalized the hegemonic conception of what constitutes 'the better argument')<sup>73</sup>.

As a result, if interests and identities deemed "private" or "strategic" are ruled out of order *a priori*, the crucial task of determining how and where individual or group concerns and interests intersect to create a consensus on common goods, is not realizable.

To accept, therefore, the premise that the common good cannot be posited as a given is to acknowledge that there are very limited grounds on

which the restriction of both the content and the format of the discussion which takes place in the public sphere can be justified. As Nancy Fraser contends:

What will count as a matter of common concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestation. It follows that no topics should be ruled off limits in advance of such contestation. On the contrary, democratic publicity requires positive guarantees of opportunities for minorities to convince others that what in the past was not public in the sense of being a matter of common concerns should now become so<sup>74</sup>.

In this sense then, the public sphere becomes an arena for the structuring and restructuring of both social identities and conceptions of the common good. It also becomes an arena in which deliberants can question and contest prevailing definitions of "public" and "private" matters. As Bruce Robbins writes, "The lines between public and private are perpetually shifting, as are the tactical advantages and disadvantages of finding oneself on one side or the other"<sup>75</sup>.

Ultimately then, as Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth argue:

The question is not whether our private lives should be free from social and political process, but rather the extent to which we can determine the direction of that process. To insist that the public keep its distance from the private will not improve the conditions in which private lives are lived. Any meaningful call to safeguard personal life must engage systematically with the interpretations between public and private and the ways they are being transformed<sup>76</sup>.

Ironically, Habermas recognizes this important function of public sphere deliberations when in analyzing the literary variant he explains that it provided

"... a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine expression of their novel privateness"<sup>77</sup>. However, the fact that he sees this self-clarification process as only an early and ultimately bypassed stage of public sphere deliberations is made clear by his description of this literary public sphere as "the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself"<sup>78</sup> (my emphasis).

Where Habermas errs is in his assumption that the process of self-clarification is only an initial phase, and not a statutory requirement of public sphere deliberations. He seems to assume that once the dominant group of the bourgeois public sphere had passed through this stage, it would have no need to return to it. Likewise, while he describes the rational discourse which is expected to reign in public sphere deliberations as a "self-corrective discourse", which is "sensitive to a critique of systematic exclusionary mechanisms built into them"<sup>79</sup>, he provides no indication of how marginalized groups are expected to contest dominant groups' definitions and agendas if private interests can be neither discussed nor unmasked. As Craig Calhoun concludes, Habermas' insistence on the sharp distinction between public and private realms, and the predetermination of the common good which this distinction implies, thus "reflects an inattention to agency, to the struggles by which both the public sphere and its participants are actively made and remade"<sup>80</sup>.

This critique of Habermas' assumption that private and public realms must remain separate domains is not intended to suggest that it is not in our



self-interest to limit the persuasive power of self-interest. In fact, often it is. However, this is done not by blindly denying the presence of self-interest in public sphere deliberations, but rather by acknowledging private issues and private concerns and then by seeking ways and arenas in which private concerns might intersect, or if necessary be reconfigured, to create public goods. This process is not a static one in which public concerns and goods can be decided once and for all, nor is it one which will necessarily result in consensus. Having said this, the problem is not, as framed by Habermas, how to keep strategic interests out of public sphere deliberations. The problem, as Richard Heilbroner notes in Twenty-first Century Capitalism, is the need to develop "...a framework in which self-interest leads to socially useful action"<sup>81</sup>. In attempting to achieve this goal, emphasis must be placed on what Daniel C. Hallin describes as "...a conception of community centered around participation in a common conversation, rather than sharing of common values"<sup>82</sup>. This is the real challenge of redefining the public sphere, assuming that an acceptable level of social equality for all participants can be achieved.

### Third problematic assumption: the separation of civil society and the state

The third problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere is the assumption that a clear separation must be maintained between civil society and the state. To understand why Habermas insists on this distinction, it is necessary to return for a moment to his historical analysis of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere. According to

Habermas' account, "civil society came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority. Activities and dependencies hitherto relegated to the framework of the household economy emerged from this confinement into the public sphere"<sup>83</sup>. As it was initially conceived, civil society was thus a sphere which was both conceptually distinct from the market economy and the state, and protected from the influence of state power and the confines of domestic life.

The reason that it was assumed that the separation between civil society and the state had to be maintained is related to the intended function and purpose of the publicity generated by civil society. According to the understanding of the day, public opinion generated by civil society was not intended to arbitrarily impose its will on state officials or force state authority to submit to its power. As Habermas notes:

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 itself was supposed to change. The domination of the public, according to its own idea, was an order in which domination itself was dissolved<sup>84</sup>.

The idea was that if legislation was based on publicity generated by civil society - a society assumed to be non-coercive given both its principle of universal access and its voluntary submission to the power of the best argument - the state's role as an instrument of domination would be largely suppressed. In other words, "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"<sup>85</sup>. The purpose of publicity generated by civil society, then, was not to assume the functions of the state, but rather to subsume, or later with the development of liberalism, to limit, the state's coercive power.

Taking his cue from the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas believes that civil society's ability to dissolve domination by means of the critical publicity it generates would be completely undermined by the intermingling of civil society and the state. To justify his argument, Habermas documents the impact that the absorption of society by the state (as demonstrated by the increased politicization of special interest associations) and the absorption of the state by society (as demonstrated by the quasi public authority of political parties) have had on critical publicity<sup>86</sup>. According to Habermas, the failure to maintain a clear division between civil society and the state has led to a process whereby the rationalization of power "takes place directly between private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties and public administration"<sup>87</sup> informed by little or no critical publicity. As a result:

....originally, publicity guaranteed the connection between rational-critical public debate and the legislative foundation of domination, including the critical supervision of its exercise. Now it makes possible the peculiar ambivalence of a domination exercised through the domination of nonpublic opinion: it serves the manipulation of the public as much as legitimation before it. Critical publicity is supplanted by manipulative publicity<sup>88</sup>.

If the critical publicity generated in the bourgeois public sphere had, in fact, been non-coercive and "public" in the true sense of the word, Habermas' fears with regards to the intermingling of society and state would indeed be justifiable.

Unfortunately, however, as was revealed in the consideration of the first two problematic assumptions, the critical publicity generated in the traditional public sphere was both coercive and nonpublic. To begin with the latter contention, this critical publicity was nonpublic insofar as it was based on propertied white males' false claim to be "the public". The nonpublic character of the critical publicity emanating from the bourgeois public sphere was further intensified by bourgeois men's tendency to predetermine the common good and thus destroy the grounds on which the consensus reached could be considered representative of the "public" will.

This critical publicity was also coercive. The logic of abstraction required to gain access to public sphere deliberations was an unequally available resource and thus an implicit instrument of domination. Moreover, as was indicated, the bourgeois public sphere structurally embodied the same limitations as the judicial and market systems in which transactions involve a redistribution of rights and a decision as to who will be exposed to the coercive force. The freedom from coercion which the unhampered deliberations of civil society was said to promise was thus unattainable *a priori*.

As a result, contrary to its stated intent to reduce or eliminate coercion and domination, Habermas' insistence on a clear separation between civil

society and the state achieves no such goal. If anything, this distinction reinforces the likelihood that deliberants in the public sphere will be victims of coercion because it provides no mechanisms for them to guarantee that their supposedly autonomously formed opinions will be translated into actual legislative decisions. In fact, it is doubtful that the opinions formed in the bourgeois public sphere were autonomous decisions at all. Contrary to Habermas' claim, deliberants' opinions were not truly emancipated from the bonds of economic depression. Insofar as the opinions generated in the bourgeois public sphere depended on objects and modes of production over which deliberants exerted no control, the process of forming opinions was an exercise in volitional, not voluntary freedom. In other words, deliberants' freedom was constrained not by their inability to generate opinions as to the value of a work of art or a political course of action, but because the objects and ideas which were the subject of their critical evaluation were determined by a sphere of production, over which they as individuals could exercise little or no control.

The problem, as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge note, is that Habermas' public sphere is conceptualized as a distributive sphere, when in fact this space of discursive interaction needs to be envisaged as a productive public sphere.

As Kluge and Negt explain:

The work of legitimation within this public sphere can be carried out and overseen only distributively, and it can itself be changed only superficially, since its real history is taking place nonpublicly in the domain of production<sup>89</sup>.

The freedom required to significantly influence the domain of production necessitates that deliberants assume an active, rather than passive role with regards to the control of both the market and the state.

Clearly, this type of control cannot be exercised by a civil society which is relegated to opinion-making functions. As a result, while civil society's claim to provide a critical discursive check on the state might be partially undermined by the extension of its powers into the realm of authoritative decision-making, limiting its role to opinion-making condemns it to a far worse fate. Habermas' insistence on the sharp separation between civil society and the state unwarrantedly limits civil society's role to that of a submissive and weak public<sup>90</sup>. As a weak public, civil society can neither exercise significant control over the market which generates the primary objects and ideas of public sphere deliberations, nor can it enforce the democratic accountability which it is legitimately entitled to expect from the state. Habermas' separation between civil society and the state is thus untenable because:

Any conception of the public sphere that requires a sharp separation between (associational) civil society and the state will be unable to imagine the forms of self-management, inter-public coordination and political accountability that are essential to a democratic, egalitarian society<sup>91</sup>.

What is needed instead, as Nancy Fraser explains, is "a post-bourgeois conception that can permit us to envision a greater role for (at least some) public spheres than mere autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision-making"<sup>92</sup>.

Habermas' fundamental failure to problematize the production and reception of output

Yet in order to determine how and in which contexts members of civil society might best exercise authoritative decision-making roles, one must first revisit Habermas' facile understanding of mass-mediated production and reception processes. As Peter Dahlgren explains in "Ideology and Information in the Public Sphere", in Habermas' vision of the ideal public sphere: "...the production of output is totally unproblematized both in terms of social and technological factors [and] the rationality and intelligibility of the output is assumed"<sup>93</sup>. In light of our discussion thus far, Habermas' failure to sufficiently problematize the production and reception of output in his consideration of the rise of the bourgeois public sphere is easily explained. The production and reception of public sphere output only become truly problematic once Habermas' first three assumptions, discussed in previous sections, are undermined. By conflating volitional and voluntary freedom and by making an artificial distinction between public and private interests and civil society and the state, Habermas was in large part able to exclude *a priori* potential obstacles to the production and reception of output.

His ability to sustain these distinctions which naturalize the production and reception of output was circumvented, however, by his inevitable need to account for the role of the electronic mass media in his analysis of the structural transformation of the public sphere. If one accepts that the printed word reinforced the logic of abstraction implicit in the bourgeois public sphere,

and thus Habermas' distinction between "public" and "private" realms, then one could conclude with Habermas that:

...radio, film and television by degrees reduce to a minimum the distance that a reader is forced to maintain toward the printed letter - a distance that required the privacy of the appropriation as much as it made possible the publicity of a rational-critical exchange about what has been read<sup>94</sup>.

According to this interpretation, the introduction of the mass media into the public sphere equation would indeed break down Habermas' conceptual barriers, such as the one he establishes between "public" and "private", and force him to justify the necessity of these distinctions.

It can just as easily be argued, however, that Habermas overemphasized the rational, disinterested character of the late eighteenth-century press in his account of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere. As James Curran argues in "Rethinking the media as a public sphere":

Habermas' implicit contrast between the democratic manipulation of the modern media and the ratiocination of the eighteenth-century press is difficult to reconcile with historical reality. His conception of reasoned discourse, is closer, in fact, to the practice of British public service broadcasting, with its ideology of disinterested professionalism, its careful balancing of opposed points of view and umpired studio discussions than it is to that of the polemicist and faction-ridden London press of the eighteenth-century operating in the context of secret service subsidies, opposition grants and the widespread bribing of journalists<sup>95</sup>.

As a result, the only way Habermas can integrate the arrival of the electronic mass media into his historical analysis - without foregoing his insistence on the sharp separation between "public" and "private" domains - is to minimize the



disruptive effect of the radical press and to posit the electronic mass media as a corruptive element which ultimately contributes to the decline of the bourgeois public sphere. As Curran further notes, the radical press "...dismissed by Habermas as deviating from reasoned debate were merely repudiating the premises of the debate, and developing a set of ideas that generalized the interests of a class excluded from the political system"<sup>96</sup>.

Nevertheless, rather than acknowledge and attempt to incorporate these contestatory elements of the media into his account of the shift from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public, Habermas categorically states that: "The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only. By the same token, the integrity of the private sphere which they promise to consumers is also an illusion"<sup>97</sup>. In considering the effect of the mass media on the production and reception of public sphere output, Habermas thus contends that, in mass-mediated societies:

...the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars of radio and television, a saleable package ready for the box office; it assumes commodity form even at conferences where anyone can participate. Discussion, now a 'business' becomes formalized; the presentation of positions and counterpositions is bound to certain prearranged rules of the game; consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by the concerning form<sup>98</sup>.

As both the quotations and the historical discrepancies noted above aptly demonstrate, Habermas also fails in Stig Hjarvard's words, to "...distinguish between commercial and publicly regulated media, they are all part of a

manipulated publicity which gradually transforms the political citizen into a private consumer"<sup>99</sup>.

The difficulty then in using Habermas as starting point for a reconsideration of the ways in which the production and reception of public sphere output as mediated by the mass media, and television in particular, need to be further problematized is, as Dana Polan explains in "The Public's Fear; or Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt and Kluge" that:

In seeming to confirm our very worst fears of the loss of the public under the pressures of media, Habermas consigns himself to the most outmoded form of Enlightenment thinking. Habermas can talk of space, of materialities, of concrete experiences, of everyday life only because his framework figures these from the start as symptoms of a monolithic fall from reason. Ironically, the more Habermas says about media, the less he is able to offer us anything useful or productive for our engagements with culture today<sup>100</sup>.

As a result, while Habermas' fear that the common good is being predetermined and that deliberants are exercising only volitional, not voluntary freedom in what he deems the pseudo public sphere of the mass media are extremely valid concerns, they are rendered impotent by the fact that they are only thrust to the forefront in his lament against the mass media.

Ironically, it is Habermas' account of the colonization of the public sphere by the mass media which ultimately becomes his analytic nemesis. Habermas' account of the corruptive role of the mass media not only forces further reconsideration of his first three problematic assumptions discussed herein, it also underscores the necessity to more fully problematize the role of the mass

media in the production and reception of output. Arguably, only in this way can the conditions and contexts of production and reception required to create a viable public sphere in a mass-mediated society be identified and then incorporated into a revisited theory of the public sphere.

Clearly, it is not within the scope of this chapter to explore all the ways in which the production and reception of public sphere output as mediated by the mass media need to be problematized in order to increase the explanatory potential of the theory of the public sphere today. Nevertheless, to illustrate the need to factor the mass media more creatively into the public sphere equation, I will briefly examine two elements of the production and reception process which need to be further problematized, and accounted for, in the theory of the public sphere. In the process, a few key questions which are raised by a reconsideration of the mass media's role in a post-bourgeois public sphere will be identified.

First, any theory of the public sphere in post-bourgeois society must acknowledge and account for the worldwide trend toward the homogenization and specialization of information produced and distributed through the mass media. As Peter Dahlgren notes:

As for the output itself, there is certainly more overall, but there are also trends afoot such as the homogenization of news and editorials and the specialization of politically relevant information. In particular, there is a dichotomy between the output aimed at informed elites and that intended for mass consumption. The growing segmentation of publics is both vertical (with information rich and poor) and horizontal (with fragmentation into narrow subcultures and discursive ghettos)<sup>101</sup>.

Significantly, however, the implications of these trends are not as unidirectional as Dahlgren would have us believe. Rather, they are double edged swords insofar as their ability to expand or contract the sphere of public debate is concerned. On the one hand, as Dahlgren rightly notes, these trends put into question both the accessibility to, and the intelligibility of, the information required to become an active and informed deliberant in an integrative public sphere which is becoming increasingly global in scope. On the other hand, as has been previously argued, the specialization of political programming can create spaces of withdrawal and regroupment for minoritized groups whose political concerns and claims are not adequately addressed by mainstream media.

Therefore, while the fragmentation of the market has the potential to enclave or ghettoize deliberants, it also has the potential to help construct and redefine social identities and to redress the disequilibrium between information rich and poor. The problem, however, as Craig Calhoun argues, is that for the latter potential to be realized: "some mechanism for ensuring more democratic access and selection is needed as a response to the concentration of ownership and increasing scale of media organizations"<sup>102</sup>. As a result, any revisited theory of the public sphere would have to address the following questions: 1) How do the trends toward specialization and homogenization of media output and the concentration of media ownership contribute to, or detract from, the viability of the public sphere in the 21st century? and 2) What is the best, or

most feasible, way to redress any imbalances in voluntary freedom that these trends might entail?

Second, in revisiting the theory of the public sphere, the varying contexts and ways in which public sphere deliberants make sense of media output, must be further problematized. In his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas has a tendency to assume that when presented with the same information or arguments, public sphere deliberants would make public use of their reason and come to the same conclusion when interpreting the output. As Peter Dahlgren notes in Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age:

In Habermas' book there seems to be an implicit understanding of how people carry on conversations and arrive at political opinions which seem strangely abstract and formalistic. References to the complexities and contradictions of meaning production, and to the concrete social settings and cultural resources at work are absent. With almost three decades of research and hindsight at our disposal, this observation could smack of all too easy criticism. Yet it could be argued that his later work in such areas as universal pragmatics and ideal speech situations makes explicit a highly rationalist orientation to human communication which is only implicit here<sup>103</sup>.

The end result of this rationalist orientation is, as Dana Polan suggests, that "...Habermas takes the new practices of cultural space as not the reality of human nature, but something that detours human nature from its rational nature"<sup>104</sup>.

However, as recent audience studies such as those done by James Lull, David Morley, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, among others, convincingly

demonstrate, individuals actively and willingly make very different sense of mass-mediated messages<sup>105</sup>. The fact that these differences tend not to be random or idiosyncratic, but rather socially patterned and bounded, only underlines the need to further understand the potential influence that the conditions and contexts of viewing can have on the process of interpreting the output. In revising the theory of the public sphere then, one needs to ask questions such as 1) What effect does family socialization and family viewing have on the mass-mediated process?; 2) Why and how do different cultures make different sense of the same media output?; 3) What forms of resistance and redefinitions of the norms of the public sphere are latent in acts of consumption? and 4) How do these different sense-making processes influence deliberants' conversations within the public sphere?

As Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt indicate in The Public Sphere and Experience:

What is striking about the prevailing interpretations of the concept of the public sphere is that they attempt to bring together a multitude of phenomena and yet exclude the two most important areas of life: the entire industrial apparatus of businesses and family socialization...The characteristic weakness of virtually all forms of the bourgeois public sphere derives from this contradiction: namely that the bourgeois public sphere excludes substantial life interests and nevertheless claims to represent society as a whole<sup>106</sup>.

In attempting to determine the numerous ways in which the mass media can either hinder or fuel the revitalization of the public sphere today, it is therefore essential to consider how both the economic and social conditions of

consumption and production are modified when mediated by the mass media.

Most importantly, however, renewed discussion of the role of the mass media in the public sphere must move beyond a transmission mode of communication which posits production as the active work of the privileged few, while consumption remains the passive response of the masses. The necessary rethinking of the relationship between the mass media and the public sphere must take as its premise the assumption that production is no more inherently active than consumption is inherently passive. Arguably, the level of active involvement which results from production or consumption fundamentally depends on the types and levels of individual investment in, and engagement with, the discursive processes of identity and group-opinion formation implicit in these activities.

Yet as Dana Polan notes, even in the work of Alexander Kluge, who was one of the first to further problematize the consumption and production process within the public sphere, there remains an oscillation between recognition of the emancipatory potential of spectatorship and a reaffirmation of the oppressive nature of consumer-producer relations. As Polan explains, Kluge as cultural worker seeks to democratize the media, particularly television, at the level of production in order to enable alternative voices to challenge the traditional knowledge-brokers who monopolize the production process. Kluge's emphasis on the power implicit in production underscores a marxist preoccupation with the masses' ability to defeat the consciousness industry by

assuming control of the production process.

On the other hand, however, Polan notes encouragingly, that Kluge as social theorist "does not remain indifferent to questions of specific form and content and is indeed quite concerned to discover how new patternings of image and sound might lead to new spectator relationships"<sup>107</sup>. Polan further states:

Kluge gives a nice glimpse of the spectatorial work (which is not fully reducible to production or consumption) in an interview with Stuart Liebman: 'In the popular scene there are networks. You make a picture; the clothes are worn by other people, real people; you see the film on television, then there is often a book made after the film. At the end you have something of a network of products...You can now throw on the same subject, the same human experience, the literary 'light' by writing a novel, a cinematic 'light' by making a film, or a discursive 'light' by writing an essay. Each of the three approaches yields a different impression, different perspectives on the same subject...I would say that the differences narrated in the different forms provoke the spectator to work toward a truth'<sup>108</sup>.

What is significant in Kluge's definition of spectatorial work is that both the production and reception processes actively engage individuals in meaning creation without denying the particularities of their lived experiences, interests and identities. Arguably, it is the symbiotic, unpredictable, dynamic and open nature of the relationship between processes of production and reception, rather than the static, predictable, predetermined and oppressive character of production, that must be more fully explored if the concept of the public sphere is to be truly revitalized.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis of both the problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' concept of the public sphere and the critiques which have ensued from it, is not to conclude that the concept is irrelevant and its ideal illusory in post-bourgeois, mass-mediated societies. Rather, this analysis points to the ways in which traditional definitions and interpretations of the public sphere need to be revisited in order to release and renew the concept's emancipatory potential. Most importantly, however, this analysis is intended to stress the openness and self-reflexivity of the public sphere as manifested in its ideals, institutions and individual deliberants.

As Miriam Hansen rightly reminds us:

The German term *Öffentlichkeit* encompasses a variety of meanings that elude its English reader as "public sphere". Like the latter, it implies a spatial concept, the social sites or arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed and negotiated, as well as the collective body constituted by and in this process, 'the public'. But *Öffentlichkeit* also denotes an ideational substance or criterion - glasnost or openness..that is produced both within these sites and in larger deterritorialized contexts<sup>109</sup>.

Such openness resists artificial distinctions between public and private realms and between the decision-making powers of civil society and the state. Moreover, it undermines the facile conflation of dominant interests with those of individuals in general. It also reinforces the complexity of the communicative process, particularly in so far as identity and group opinion formation are concerned. As a result, this openness is not without its tensions and

challenges. Yet it is by far, a more liberating, historically accurate and humane basis from which to begin reassessing and reasserting the analytic and experiential value of the public sphere. Rather than allow the concept and its ideals to become stale, flat referents, it continuously reaffirms that "...the public sphere is an unfulfilled task - in Homi Bhabba's words, a 'conversation we have to open up'"<sup>110</sup>.

## END NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

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### **REPOSITIONING PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN A MULTI-CHANNEL AND MULTI-MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

As was aptly demonstrated in the previous chapter, inequalities amongst public sphere deliberants persist even after everyone has been formally and legally licensed to participate. Moreover, bracketing status differentials to deliberate as if all participants were equal was shown to be a chimera, a dangerous one at that, which masks the inequality of negative freedom amongst participants and confounds their volitional and voluntary freedom. But how does this insight apply to public broadcasting? More specifically, in which ways does the internalization of this problematic assumption undermine the ideal of democratic communication implicit in the public broadcasting project? What types of inequality and freedom does this assumption foster in relation to public broadcasting programming and decision-making worldwide? Who benefits from coercive power in the realm of public communication and how can the opportunities to exercise more voluntary freedom be multiplied for all citizens? Finally, what types of relationships should public broadcasters seek to cultivate both internally (i.e. among their local, regional, national and international programming divisions) and externally (i.e. with other access, educational, public and private media outlets) to create the optimal conditions for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication? It is to these important questions that I turn my attention in this chapter.

To begin, I parallel Habermas' belief that a free market is the best structural mechanism to ensure equal opportunity to compete for access to the public sphere with contemporary broadcasting policy's celebratory emphasis on deregulation and privatization as the best means of ensuring the greatest variety of viewing options. Yet rather than embrace the economic rationalism implicit in this stance, I eschew the free choice ideology of market competition by highlighting the structural limitations of freedom and equality which the market system embodies. In particular, I argue that singular reliance on the free market to ensure the greatest possible broadcasting choices results in unacceptable inequalities with regards to ownership rights, production opportunities, knowledge-brokering roles and even consumption options. As a result of this critique, I contend that more opportunities to be involved in determining the fora, the scope, the purpose and the content of public broadcasting programming and decision-making must be envisaged. This critique also entails the recognition that the advent of a multi-channel universe need not send national public broadcasters careening, but rather may provide an environment for the creation of complementary and pluralistic networks of media services which can justify national public broadcasters' role as integrative arenas of discursive interaction.

In order to substantiate national public broadcasters' potential role as one among many integrative arenas of discursive interaction, I address four related concerns. First, with the help of Anthony Giddens' observations on the

consequences of modernity, I explain the reasons that, and the conditions according to which, local, access and specialty service media might legitimize national public broadcasters' role as integrative discursive arenas. Second, I explain why the move to posit national public broadcasters as counter-public media outlets along side the growing number of specialty service and access broadcasters would be antithetical to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. Third, I indicate how positing national public broadcasters as integrative fora of discursive interaction relates to a particular understanding and vision of the international broadcast and media environment. And finally, I suggest the ways in which the tension between public broadcasters' local and national programming priorities might best be understood in light of their redefined role in a multi-channel and multi-media universe. The end result will be to begin to explore the complex ways in which public broadcasting must interlace its local and global components in order to maximize in real, not just ideal terms, the fora in which citizens can participate in identity formation and opinion-building processes.

#### The structural limitations of a free market

The analysis of the first problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere provides pertinent insights with regards to the strategic positioning required of public broadcasting in order for it to flourish in a multi-channel and multi-media environment. In particular, Habermas' discussion of the socio-economic conditions required to promote the

levels of freedom required to deliberate as equals in the public sphere belies two of the most commonly held, though misguided, beliefs about the promises and the pitfalls of a multi-channel broadcasting system. First, Habermas has unwavering faith in the free market's ability - when totally unhampered by government forces - to provide the conditions required to accede to the status of deliberant in the public sphere. Habermas' belief is comparable to the dominant broadcast policy rhetoric that insists the proliferation of market-driven broadcasting services will guarantee an as yet unexperienced level of freedom and equality in television viewing options.

Second, Habermas rails against the rise of competing publics in the form of special interest associations and political parties. He sees this trend as tantamount to disaster for the spread of liberal democracy. Habermas' concern parallels the reverberating fear in many nation-states that the advent of a multi-channel and multi-media universe with its accompanying fragmentation of the audience and transgression of national borders will radically undermine the power and persuasiveness of broadcasting as a means of societal integration. Both of these contentions will be refuted in this chapter. As I will demonstrate, the espousal of this logic circumscribes the possibility of imagining more complex networks of freedom and equality. Ultimately then, such logic subverts the ideal of democratic communication which I argue should fuel public broadcasting programming and decision-making.

Given that the free market system's inability to sustain the levels of

freedom and equality required for deliberation in the public sphere have been discussed at length in the previous chapter, I will not make the case again in detail here. Nevertheless, to reiterate succinctly in general terms, contrary to pure liberal belief, negative freedom is not guaranteed for all by the untrammelled spread of a free market. Free market transactions inevitably result in the subjugation of certain individuals and groups to others' coercive power and thus entail a redistribution of rights. In this sense then, the free market is not a neutral system, but one in which "adaptation becomes the moral criterion"<sup>1</sup>. In seeking to realize its guiding ideal of efficiency, the free market propagates the value of normalcy thereby crippling human agency. In short, the logic of the market is such that market values erode, and ultimately triumph over, human values. Insofar as the pursuit of the ideal of democratic communication is concerned, the question then becomes what types of inequality and freedom does the free market system promote with regards to broadcasting when allowed to act unhampered by government or civil society?

The first type of inequality amongst citizens that a free market approach to television broadcasting perpetuates has been so widely internalized as a structural limitation of the system that it has been normalized as a given in most discussions of media inequities. As John Durnham Peters and Kenneth Cmielewski rightly note in "Media Ethics and the Public Sphere":

That the public is only a consumer and not a producer of communications has only rarely been posed as an urgent ethical issue. Instead, the asymmetry in access between media professionals and 'the public' to the means of

communications, is usually assumed as a given...theoretical energy then turns to making the senders responsible makers of messages and the receivers critical consumers of them...[this] is one sign of the lack of a clear public sphere in both our society and imagination<sup>2</sup>.

The subsequent emphasis on professional media ethics with its accompanying litany of *caveat lector* that the acceptance of these respective roles for producers and viewers promotes, turns a blind eye to the systematic way in which the free market sustains and reinforces unacceptable inequities of voluntary freedom amongst citizens. In other words, such a stance totally disregards the importance of the fact that, insofar as the majority of citizens have little or no control over the means of production, their freedom of choice which market proponents are so quick to celebrate is limited to choosing from amongst a standardized slate of pre-determined programming options.

Confronted with this line of argumentation, free market proponents would contend that the structural inability of the system to accommodate all or even most citizens who wish to become broadcast owners - or even less ambitiously to act as producers of programming - is a structural limitation of the broadcast technology, not of the free market. Consequently, they would argue that given the epistemic limitations of the medium, the free market is the best mechanism to ensure the greatest and most equitable opportunity for individuals to qualify for access to the economic and social means required to attain the status of a broadcasting producer or owner. Furthermore, they would point to corporate citizens' willingness to bolster access broadcasting as

an example of the free market system's ability to open up and sustain opportunities for public access and ownership - opportunities which, in their estimation, would be severely curtailed were it not for the infusion of technical and financial support provided by the private sector.

However, what free market proponents fail to realize or at least are unwilling to acknowledge openly is that the free market system is ultimately self-paralysing. As John Keane explains in his consideration of the consequences of media deregulation, the market systems:

...regularly create endemic contradictions and dilemmas which belie their claim to openness, universality and accessibility....Unrestricted competition does not necessarily ensure freedom of entry of producers into the marketplace. Markets are often not contestable because the levels of investment required to enter the market are too high or too risky, due to an existing stranglehold of monopolies or cartels that have already 'creamed off' the market potential<sup>3</sup>.

The increasingly unassailable vertical and horizontal integration of media ownership not only within nation-states but also on a transnational scale speaks forcefully to this point.

Notably, this trend towards media concentration contributes to profound inequalities not only in production and ownership opportunities, but also in consumption options. While a free market system is likely to increase the *quantity* of output, there is no necessary accompanying increase in either the *quality* or the *variety* of output. In fact, when the market values of efficiency and risk minimization dictate the conditions of entry and the content of the product provided, the tendency is overwhelmingly towards product

homogenization. Where economic conditions stimulate creativity in order to conquer an as yet unsaturated market, this creativity is nevertheless constrained within the self-stultifying boundaries of a *commercially viable* product<sup>4</sup>. The end result of this process is to put into question the accessibility to, and the intelligibility of, the information required to become an active and informed deliberant both in relation to broadcasting and the public sphere.

In this sense then, the free market delivers the opposite of what it promises. While purporting to provide greater freedom and equality for viewers, it reinforces inequalities in communication entitlements amongst citizens. Stated otherwise, the free market actually takes a step backwards in fulfilling the democratic principles that underlie television's potential and purpose. Or as Dominique Wolton reminds us in "Pourquoi une télévision publique?": "Sous couvert de répondre aux demandes, on maintient les différences sociales et culturelles. La spécialisation comme reproduction de la hiérarchie"<sup>5</sup>.

The free market system's inability to deliver on its promise of greater choice and freedom because its internal logic leads to the concentration of media ownership and the homogenization or specialization of information is not its only limitation. The free market system is also unable to counteract the profound inequalities in knowledge-brokering roles exercised primarily by journalists and politicians within both broadcasting and the public sphere. As



Nicholas Garnham explains in "The Media and the Public Sphere":

There is no place in the theory for the social role and power of expertise and expert knowledge nor, and this is crucial, for the role and social interests associated with knowledge brokering. Thus it becomes difficult to handle the problem of the role of those who in fact manage the conduct of the information-gathering and debate which is the Public Sphere's *raison d'être*, namely, in particular, journalists and politicians themselves<sup>6</sup>.

Now clearly, journalists', politicians' and citizens' varying levels of freedom in determining the scope and the content of debate is a problem which permeates the public sphere; it is not the sole franchise of a free market system. What is noteworthy, however, is that, contrary to its stated intent to increase human freedom and choice, the free market system is unable to eliminate these hegemonic biases, but rather naturalizes them to such an extent that it reinforces them.

Second, and even more significantly, the free market posits a third group of cohorts as knowledge-brokers, a group which ultimately usurps even the relative freedom enjoyed by journalists and politicians to determine the scope and the content of debate. The group in question?: commercial advertisers and sponsors. The ways in which commercial advertisers and sponsors infiltrate, entrench themselves and eventually dominate the realm of commercial and more recently public broadcasting decision-making have been widely documented. Given their understanding of "the audience" as markets to be exploited, advertisers are not primarily concerned with the altruistic task of enhancing freedom and equality amongst citizens; their guiding principle is to

get "the biggest bang for their buck". Advertisers' interest in supporting or promoting greater variety or quality in available viewing options is thus directly proportional to the anticipated return on their investment. If a standardized fare of relatively inexpensive program material will attract the same or greater audience than risky or costly program innovation, there is little doubt that the former will be privileged, albeit at the expense of viewers' choice.

As Jay Blumler explains in "Prospects for Creativity in the New Television Marketplace", when advertisers become the supreme knowledge-brokers, creative concerns "are valued only instrumentally - for whatever they may be able to contribute to commercial goals - and will always be in danger of being jettisoned, violated or compromised when seemingly they cannot so deliver"<sup>7</sup>. For instance, program-makers' creativity is compromised when they are forced to homogenize material destined for acceptance in multiple markets. Likewise, their creativity is violated when advertising is either integrated into their scripts or when it dictates and disrupts the flow of information and entertainment programming. Last, but not least, their creativity is jettisoned when they cannot convince advertisers to sponsor certain programs because they do not conform to the socio-demographic profile of the consumers to whom the products are being sold.

In the final analysis, then, the facile correlation between the "freeing up" of the market and an increase in citizens' freedom and equality with regards to ownership, production, knowledge-brokering or even consumption of

broadcasting, must be rejected not as a gross oversimplification, but as a fundamentally flawed proposition. John Keane is right when he states that:

The market liberal talk of 'freedom and choice rather than regulation and scarcity', when decoded in plain English, means exactly this: 'We assume that a market-based capitalist economy is here forever. It is legitimate and viable, indeed the best system ever invented for satisfying individuals' demands. We offer you all kinds of choices as long as you, the consumer, restrict your choices to the terms agreeable to us, the entrepreneur. If you don't agree - well, tough. Why not start up your own company?'<sup>8</sup>

The terms agreeable to the market - the maximization of efficiency through media concentration, the homogenization and specialization of knowledge produced and distributed, and the subjugation of creativity and diversity to the coercive power of advertisers - are clearly not terms that are compatible with the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. Insofar as the free market is fuelled by a guiding ideal of efficiency and held captive to the logic of the maximization of profit through the minimization of risk, its end product will likely be, in the words of Jay Blumler, "...a pragmatic pluralism, yielding only the amount and those forms of diversity that are likely to pay"<sup>9</sup>.

As a result, any attempt to secure the levels of freedom and equality required to open up the human conversation and, by extension, fire the embers of the public sphere, must necessarily include indications as to the best or most feasible ways of redressing the imbalances of voluntary freedom implicit in the market system. Greater credence must therefore be given to media theories and practices which seek to enhance citizens' voluntary freedom by increasing

their opportunities for involvement not only in deciding the fora, scope and purpose of broadcasting programs, but also in administering and supervising the system itself. To achieve this goal, the coercive power exercised by knowledge-brokers within the system - be they advertisers, owners, politicians or journalists - must be explicitly theorized and pragmatically acknowledged. Mechanisms to counteract the free market's tendency towards the homogenization of programming and the concentration of ownership must also be envisaged and implemented.

Moreover, strategies not only of resistance but of empowerment must be identified and harnessed in all three realms of broadcasting. Insofar as the realm of reception is concerned, this entails a reconsideration of both the forms of self-identification and a redefinition of the norms of the public sphere that are latent in acts of consumption. It also requires an explanation of how viewers' different sense-making processes based on cultural and family socialization both enhance and limit freedom of interpretation and use of broadcast material. Insofar as the distributive realm is concerned, efforts to heighten freedom and equality necessitate that the trend towards specialization of information be further problematized. Such a move would likely result in the recognition that these trends are not as unidirectional in their effects as first apparent. They can either expand or contract the sphere of personal and collective identification and fulfilment within broadcasting depending on how they are wielded and by whom. Third, these strategies must include

mechanisms for democratic intervention and control of the broadcast systems themselves, particularly in relation to the realm of production. As Roger de la Garde is quick to point out "...freedom of choice in television means the freedom and the means to produce television, not merely to consume it"<sup>10</sup>.

Most importantly, however, such strategies must be rooted in the recognition that though the free market is ultimately incapable of single-handedly creating and sustaining the complex networks of freedom and equality required to increase citizens' involvement in broadcast decision-making and programming, it still has a contribution to make to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. As will become apparent in the next chapter, citizens are no better served by a state regulated broadcast system that subsumes all market considerations to nationalist imperatives. It would thus be an error to overlook the fact that the free market can at times be an unpredictable and dynamic agent of change. As Bruce Robbins argues in his introduction to The Phantom Public Sphere, an unregulated free market can occasionally be both "a site of hidden, new, controversial or otherwise interesting publicness"<sup>11</sup> and an arena that expresses "the often contestatory desires of its diverse publics far better than the culture otherwise available"<sup>12</sup>.

As a result, as Robbins notes, "without celebrating consumerism as such or surrendering to currently fashionable capitalist triumphalism, one must conclude that state intervention is not inherently more public - more democratic, more empowering than the market". Rather, as shall be argued in

Chapter 5, the market and the state must act as counter-cutting forces which create and reinforce opportunities for citizens to exercise more voluntary freedom in the administration, production and reception of broadcasting. If these opportunities are lacking, "instead of a process which is finalized according to its ideal development, we will generalize from a model"<sup>13</sup> -a fundamentally flawed model at that.

#### Creating networks of freedom and equality in a multi-channel universe

I have indicated why the free market is unable, in and of itself, to create and sustain complex networks of freedom and equality, and I have suggested, albeit briefly, why the enhancement of voluntary freedom is not only desirable, but essential for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. However, I have yet to address the issue of what forms these "complex networks of freedom and equality" might take in a multi-channel and multi-media universe. Significantly, the opportunity to imagine and argue in favour of a particular vision of the alliances that public broadcasters should seek to develop in a multi-channel and multi-media environment is itself an exercise in voluntary freedom. As Jay Rosen notes, in Hannah Arendt's view, "to create (or defend) structures in which the possibilities for action are secured is one of the outstanding uses of freedom"<sup>14</sup>.

It is in this sense that the advent of a multi-channel and multi-media universe should be greeted. It should be welcomed as an opportunity to reconsider and potentially redefine the collaborative broadcast/media structures

and initiatives which can contribute to greater levels of freedom and equality for all citizens. Unfortunately, however, these technological developments in the realm of the media have been acknowledged primarily with apprehension by public broadcasting proponents. According to this pessimistic view, the availability and dissemination of more channels or more media choices on the information highway can only be characterized as an increase in noise which will further hinder public broadcasters' ability to ensure that their messages reach their audiences. Those who hold this view expect this noise to further encourage not only "viewers' consumerist flight into fantasy"<sup>15</sup> at the expense of more serious citizen fare, but also the permanent "Dallasification"<sup>16</sup> of entertainment at the expense of indigenous production. While this take on the implications of a multi-channel and multi-media environment is understandable given the uncertainty which looms over public broadcasting at the moment, it is an alarmist and ultimately a disempowering stance.

It is encouraging, therefore, that despite this dominant rhetoric, some public broadcasting scholars do recognize the opportunities and imperatives implicit in this multi-media and multi-channel milieu. For instance, Robert Avery in the epilogue to *Public Service Broadcasting in a Multi-Channel Environment* contends that the future of public service broadcasting lies not in "fruitless attempts to stem the tide of commercialization or to preserve institutional boundaries and traditions for the sake of maintaining the status quo"<sup>17</sup>. Rather, Avery suggests that public service broadcasting must "move quickly to

build the alliances that will preserve the spirit, if not the form, of public service idealism"<sup>18</sup>. Likewise, Florian Sauvageau in *Le défi des télévisions publiques à l'ère de la mondialisation* acknowledges that:

...la télévision publique aussi doit changer, créer de nouvelles formules, inventer de nouvelles structures, compter avec les solidarités nouvelles. Les ruptures et les intégrations de société que l'on constate maintenant vont se refléter dans l'organisation et la vie des médias<sup>19</sup>.

The problem with both Avery's and Sauvageau's conclusions is that they are tinged with a stoic acceptance of, or resignation to, a seemingly inevitable abandonment of public broadcasting by government, and subsequent subjugation of public broadcasting to market and technological imperatives.

However, public broadcasters' quest for new alliances both in their internal structures and in their relationships with others broadcast and media outlets should not be motivated by this acquiescing attitude. Rather, the reappraisal of these relationships should be prompted by the recognition that the pluralistic societies in which public broadcasters now operate demand and deserve more complex networks in which citizens can discuss and resolve the practical and philosophical issues which affect their daily lives. As Jean Cohen rightly notes:

...both the complexity and diversity within contemporary civil societies calls for the posing of the issues of democratization in terms of a variety of differentiated processes, forms and loci depending on the axis of divisions concerned<sup>20</sup>.

We need to acknowledge, therefore, that the advent of a multi-channel and



multi-media universe need not sound the death knoll of public broadcasting worldwide. In fact, this new communications environment may well provide the optimum conditions for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication and the revitalization of the public sphere itself. As such, other media and broadcast outlets should not be viewed as hostile competitors that will inevitably usurp public broadcasters' discursive role, but as collaborators in the process of providing access to, and integration of, the conversations of the public sphere.

For instance, the multiplication of access and specialty service media outlets in a post-scarcity broadcasting era can make an essential contribution to the future recognition of national public broadcasters as integrative arenas of discursive interaction. However, national public broadcasters will never be legitimized in this role if they insist on functioning in isolation from, or in competition against, other broadcast and media outlets. Rather, national public broadcasters must admit these established and burgeoning media outlets as essential partners and seek to establish with them the types of alliances which will not homogenize production and reception options, but diversify them. Specifically, national public broadcasters must recognize the entry of a myriad of new media and broadcast outlets into their traditional enclave as crucial to the realization of the ideal insofar as these communication networks, like the counter-public spheres posited opposite Habermas' all-inclusive public sphere, provide the training ground and the discursive space for the creation and

redefinition of social identities and group opinion formation.

To better explain the types of alliances that national public broadcasters' acceptance of new media and alternative broadcast outlets as collaborative partners implies, we will briefly revisit Anthony Giddens' observation on the consequences of modernity. Contrary to Habermas, who posits the rise of the welfare state, the mass media and special interests associations as the underlying causes of the public sphere's atrophy, Anthony Giddens works from the assumption that "human relations in the era of high modernity are subject to transformation, not disintegration"<sup>21</sup>. He acknowledges, as does Habermas, that:

...as the capitalist economy, media, formal educational institutions and other abstract systems increasingly attract the commitment of individuals, there is a weakening of the compulsory nature of the rights and obligations that serve to bind members of the traditional family<sup>22</sup>.

Importantly, however, he does not see this trend as the disintegration of the bonds that bind, but rather as a transformation of both the nature of, and the means of attaining, societal integration. As Philip Cassell explains in his introduction to The Giddens Reader, "as no abstract systems have evolved to take the place of family or close-knit village community, the onus is on the individual to seek out and cultivate those trusting relations with others that remain essential for the integrity of self"<sup>23</sup>.

While abstract systems are ultimately unable to provide the same degree of ontological security and psychological embedding offered by traditional

societies, they are nevertheless fundamentally implicated in the process of individual self-realization. As Giddens argues:

...in the settings of modernity, the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of the reflexive process of connecting personal and social change...In such circumstances, abstract systems become centrally involved not only in the institutional order of modernity, but also in the formalization and continuity of self<sup>24</sup>.

This reliance on abstract systems combined with the thoroughly "reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups"<sup>25</sup>, forces the modern individual to accept a greater degree of risk, and consequently, rely on a greater degree of trust than ever before. Importantly, the degree of trust that modern individuals are willing or able to invest in other people or systems, is, in Giddens' estimation, "directly connected to [their] psychological security"<sup>26</sup>.

Insofar as modern individuals' relationships with abstract systems are concerned, Giddens believes that "attitudes of trust towards abstract systems are strongly influenced by experiences at access points"<sup>27</sup>. These access points of which Giddens speaks are defined as "points of connection between lay persons and groups and the representatives of abstract systems"<sup>28</sup>. Experiences at access points not only significantly influence attitudes of trust, they also contribute meaningfully to the process of re-embedding social relations and practices, processes which have been disembedded by the rise of symbolic tokens and expert systems which "remove social relations from the immediacy of context"<sup>29</sup>. While the fate of modern individuals is such that

"feelings of ontological security and existential angst will coexist in ambivalence"<sup>30</sup>, favourable experiences at access points can minimize individuals' sense of risk and elicit their trust. These experiences can thus encourage a "form of 'faith' in which the confidence vested in probable outcomes expresses a commitment to something rather than just a cognitive understanding"<sup>31</sup>.

What is the link between Giddens' theory of high modernity and our discussion of the role of national public broadcasting in a multi-channel and multi-media environment? When we posit national public broadcasters as one of the abstract systems in Giddens' equation, the link becomes readily apparent. Insofar as new media and alternative broadcast outlets, together with local outlets of national public broadcasting, function as access points, they are essential to the legitimization of national public broadcasters. For citizens of the modern era to invest their trust in national public broadcasting as integrative arenas of discursive interaction, they require favourable and repeated contact with the access points to the system; experiences which are both democratic and inclusive.

In this sense then, new media and alternative broadcast outlets as well as local divisions of the national public broadcasters are crucial to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. As Philip Cassell explains: "citizens at the local level broadly accept the legitimacy of surveillance activities of the administrative state because of the state's democratic

constitutions"<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, citizens are far more likely to accept the legitimacy of national public broadcasters as integrative arenas of public debate and identity formation if the decisions made and the positions advanced in the more localized or specialized media reflect their concerns and interests.

Moreover, given that this "legitimacy allows for the placement of distant forces into the local contexts for given lengths of time"<sup>33</sup>, these local public, access and speciality service media outlets will play a fundamental role in counteracting the disembedding process implicit in all abstract systems, including national public broadcasting. As John Keane argues:

Communication networks can help to offset the tendency of the mass media to pile discontinuity onto us, to wash away memories, to dissolve and fast cut, to throw away yesterday's papers. Decentralized networks of communication address the dangers of 'uprootedness' and the felt need of many citizens to put down roots within civil society through forms of association which preserve particular memories of the past, a measure of stability in the present and particular expectations for the future<sup>34</sup>.

This observation raises an important point that must not be overlooked in the search to open up the human conversation.

Humans have an almost biological need for the sense of security and self-definition that closure provides. As Peter Dahlgren notes in "What's the meaning of this? Viewers' plural sense-making of TV news", while modern individuals seek to "integrate into their world-views the continuous stream of new phenomenon they encounter"<sup>35</sup>, they are primarily preoccupied with "creating a general coherence in their lives and establishing an order in which

to anchor their existence"<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, if the degree of trust required to incite citizens to open themselves to other arguments and perspectives is to be cultivated in part through national public broadcasting, these institutions must not exacerbate, but rather address and help modern individuals to cope with, the unsettling psychological insecurities of the modern era.

Stated otherwise, although the interaction required to realize the ideal of democratic communication underlying national public broadcasting is inevitably a self-reflexive process, Giddens is quick to remind us that:

The individual must integrate information deriving from a diversity of mediated experiences with local involvement in such a way as to connect future projects with past experiences in a reasonably coherent fashion. Only if the person is able to develop an inner authenticity, a framework of basic trust by which the lifespan can be understood as a unity against the backdrop of shifting social events can this be attained<sup>37</sup>.

New media and alternative broadcast outlets insofar as they become discursive arenas in which individuals with similar interests, concerns and/or needs can withdraw and regroup in order to then test their ideas and actions in a larger more integrative discursive arena, can help to develop this inner authenticity in a way that larger, more integrative media outlets cannot.

As a result, new media and alternative broadcast outlets may well be the most successful re-embedding mechanism in light of the disembedding tendencies of the systems of modernity. As Tosten Hagerstrand states:

The closer to home, the more likely the combination of observations and personal accounts becomes, and the more likely it is that the same persons and topics come within

sight repeatedly. All this contributes to making situational knowledge meaningful, because one is able to see its temporal roots and its surrounding circumstances. To most people, reports from distant places do not have this *double anchoring*. They direct spotlights at widely scattered events detached from their contexts. A jerky continuity is reserved for the political stage, whereas the majority of personal accounts or stories contribute more to entertainment than to understanding<sup>38</sup>.

Communication networks which succeed in providing this double-anchoring thus play a vital role in individuals' and groups' self-awareness, self-identification and self-enactment processes.

This recognition of the importance of local, specialized and decentralized media would seem to suggest that national public broadcasters would best distinguish themselves from national private networks and would best serve their constituents if they were to posit themselves along side the growing number of access and specialty service broadcasters. In fact, this line of reasoning has led some broadcasting proponents to suggest that national public broadcasters should seek to provide a voice for minority groups not adequately represented by the mainstream media. According to this logic, national public broadcasters' audiences would be conceived of not as mass publics, but as a series of micro-publics, each vying for the opportunity to see themselves and hear their viewpoints represented on national public broadcasting networks. As Bernard Cache suggests in "Rawls regarde la télévision", such an understanding of the role of national public broadcasting in a multi-channel environment would lead to the recognition that:

Au lieu de réunir régulièrement le grand public, cette chaîne devrait...faire le tour de la société sur la base des segmentations les plus fines et les plus variables; à un degré encore plus fin que le seuil de taille minimum que doit présenter un public pour intéresser un vidéo-service comme Canal Plus. Cette stratégie ferait de la chaîne de service public un véritable laboratoire social et culturel: - un social comme le conçoit Rawls, c'est-à-dire, une communauté de communautés et non pas cette entité libérale abstraite que serait une société globale<sup>39</sup>.

However, such a conclusion is not only simplistic, it is ultimately counter-productive to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication.

While such a role for national public broadcasters may well ensure that a greater variety of voices are represented, it actually reduces the opportunities for individuals and groups who have different interests and concerns to directly confront other realities and visions in an integrative discursive arena. Given that these micro-publics are conceived of, or function without sufficient opportunities or expectations to address the "public-at-large", they are impotent in their ability to influence publicity outside their separatist enclave. Such is the case with community cable, which as Liora Salter explains, is often

...decentralized to a radical extent because its audience is conceived of as groups with few, if any, overlapping memberships and concerns. The audience is treated as if groups within it could be compartmentalized in terms of their interests...The relationship between producers and the groups in the audience are not mediated by organizations representing the collective of all of them<sup>40</sup>.

This is also the fate of even the most successful local public, access or specialty service broadcasters in the absence of larger, more inclusive discursive arenas which enable groups to talk across cultural, gender, racial



and linguistic lines. For as Marlon Riggs rightly argues:

...the burden of today's historical moment when identities world-wide are radically reformulating is for us to speak to each other, across the border of identity, across our multiple positions and strategies of self-empowerment in ways that build a truly radical multicultural coalition, perhaps even community.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, accomplishing such a goal requires both decentralized, democratic and noncoercive access points and integrative, border-crossing and interdependent arenas of discursive interaction.

Yet some such as George Gilder, author of Life After Television, would vehemently dispute this claim. According to Gilder, integrative arenas of discursive interaction will be unnecessary once supersmart telecomputers or "teleputers" become the dominant medium of public communication. Gilder argues that the teleputer which will enable citizens to directly access conversations and information from a myriad of sources, will enhance individualism and creativity thereby strengthening capitalism and democracy around the world<sup>42</sup>. In Gilder's estimation, the teleputer is revolutionary because it is based on the law of the microcosm in which "...efficiency, not complexity grows as the square of the number of interconnections, or switches, to be organized" grows.<sup>43</sup> The teleputer will not only be faster, cheaper and more reliable, it will also dramatically reduce "friction, resistance, entropy and chaotic movement"<sup>44</sup> to such an extent that another million people could arrive at the discursive "party" and the noise level would still go down<sup>45</sup>.

The end result of this process, Gilder contends, will be that:

All hierarchies will tend to become 'heterarchies' - systems in which each individual rules his own domain. In contrast to a hierarchy ruled from the top, a heterarchy is a society of equals under the law...the new law of networks exalts the smallest coherent system: the individual human mind and spirit<sup>46</sup>.

In reaching this conclusion, Gilder fails to address how individuals are to live or work in concert, at the very least to administer shared resources. While this issue may be irrelevant for Gilder as he believes that people "are sharply differentiated in their civilized concerns"<sup>47</sup> and "have little in common except their prurient interests and morbid fears and anxieties"<sup>48</sup>, it is a crucial question for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication.

Obviously, there are many problems with Gilder's analysis, not the least of which are his conflation of capitalism with democracy; his espousal of the ideal of efficiency at the expense of human complexity and unpredictability; and his failure to recognize individuals as fundamentally dialogical beings. Most importantly, however, Gilder's vision of communication in the future completely disregards individuals' inability qua individuals not to create, but to sustain, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional arenas of discursive interaction. As John Keane explains in Civil Society and Democracy, a democratic civil society, void of any integrative discursive mechanisms or arenas, be they political, military, economic or media institutions:

...would always tend to be self-paralysing. Precisely because of its pluralism and its lack of a guiding centre, a fully democratic civil society would be endangered by poor

co-ordination, disagreement, niggardliness and open conflict among its constituents...civil society can also degenerate into a battlefield, in which the stronger - thanks to the existence of certain civil liberties - enjoy the freedom to twist the arms of the weaker. Under extreme conditions, civil society could even haemorrhage to death<sup>49</sup>.

As a result, if there are not legitimate or recognized integrative arenas in which ideas and actions can be tabled, substantively sifted, reconsidered, mediated and/or refuted, the decentralized democratic access points that scholars such as Gilder are so quick to celebrate "will become ghettoized, divided and stagnant, or will spawn their own, new forms of inequality and unfreedom"<sup>50</sup>.

#### Positing national public broadcasters as integrative arenas of discursive interaction

Once we acknowledge that the realization of the ideal of democratic communication necessitates that institutions such as national public broadcasting be posited as one among many integrative arenas of discursive interaction, the problem becomes one of how to avoid 1) reproducing a coercive hierarchy of public space and 2) conceptualizing too linear a vision of the inter-relationships amongst various levels and types of communication outlets. How one can unwittingly fall into these traps, despite the intent to secure and promote free exchange in the public sphere, can be readily understood by following Nicholas Garnham's argumentation in "The Media and the Public Sphere"<sup>51</sup>. In this article, Garnham argues, that "debate must include as many of the existing views in a society on the relevant issues as possible. This cannot, by definition, be provided by sectionalized, ghettoized

media talking only to a particular interest group or the party faithful"<sup>52</sup>.

Yet contrary to my recognition of the vital contribution that access, specialty service and local public broadcasters, not to mention new media outlets, make to the legitimization of national public broadcasters as integrative arenas of discursive interaction, Garnham contends that "in terms of national issues, it [debate] **must** take place at a national level and is **undercut** by a multiplication of simultaneous viewing and listening options"<sup>53</sup> (bold mine). In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that the multiplication of access, specialty service and local public broadcasters, together with the forms of local rationality which they sustain, is fundamentally incompatible with the realization of the ideal of democratic communication. As a result, Garnham eschews what he describes as cultural relativism in favour of "some common normative dimension"<sup>54</sup> supposedly shared by the mass media and the polity. He also rejects the potential contribution of local rationality, stating "if, whether we like it or not, the problem faced has a general impact upon us all, then there can only be one rationally determined course of interventionist political action"<sup>55</sup>.

Ironically, Garnham's inability to recognize the validity of a multiplicity of competing media outlets, except insofar as they are subsumed to "a single public sphere"<sup>56</sup> which is increasingly global in scope, contradicts his emphasis on favouring citizen participation in public policy debate. Rather than open up the human conversation, his tendency to subsume local and national

rationality to an international public sphere belies his vision of both the public sphere and its most comprehensive media outlet as a single, normative and hierarchical space of discursive interaction. Garnham justifies his insistence on the need to posit a universal public sphere with media and political systems of the same scale by arguing that these are the only mechanisms which will "translate debate into action"<sup>57</sup> and ensure "effective political response"<sup>58</sup> to global market forces. However, as Peter Hohendahl suggests, "while local rationality does not claim to provide a conclusive mechanism for creating consensus, it does offer a comparative analysis of competing needs and values up to the point where a compromise can be negotiated"<sup>59</sup>. It would thus be a grave mistake to overlook the fact that local arenas of discursive interaction can sometimes hold the key to solving global dilemmas. Likewise, global reverberations can, at times, have profound significance for individual self-realization. As Giddens argues: "Global connections of many kinds are the very condition of forms of individual self-actualization, including those that act to minimise high consequence risks"<sup>60</sup>.

As a result, in contesting the insistence on subsuming local and national media outlets to a global media system, I am not indulging in a romanticized vision of local empowerment at the expense of global realism. I agree with Alexander Kluge when he states that:

...since the local and the global have become irreversibly entwined in people's experience, the category of the local itself needs to be reconceptualized, beyond a nostalgic restoration of urban space, if it is to have any significance

for an alternative or counter-public sphere<sup>61</sup>.

Furthermore, I recognize, as does Shaun Moores, that not all modern subjects will experience global and local contact in the same way. As Moores notes:

...depending upon where we are placed in relations of class, gender or ethnicity - and in time-space geographies - there will be widely varying experiences of globalization. The same goes for daily life at the local level, too. So if we return to the example of facework between strangers in a city street, it is evident that such routine interactions generate higher anxiety for some than they do for others - depending on who the participants are and precisely where their encounter takes place. Dynamics of trust and risk in this localized situation may be determined by the relative positions of the social actors involved<sup>62</sup>.

One must therefore be careful about overgeneralizing experiences of localization and globalization as Moores suggests Giddens is prone to do.

Keeping this caveat in mind, Garnham remains totally incapable of theorizing either the complex and diverse ways in which citizens interact in a local-global continuum, or the variety and combination of strategies they use to minimize risk in their lives. Insofar as the former contention is concerned, the mere fact that Garnham asks the question: "Are we to conceive of ourselves as citizens of the world or of a nation-state or of a community or of what?"<sup>63</sup> (bold mine) and then insists that we slot ourselves into the "citizens of the world" category belies the narrowness and linearity of his vision. Why must citizens, in defining and discussing their roles within both public broadcasting and the public sphere be forced to delineate the spaces and roles they occupy in terms of the binary opposition of either/or? Garnham argues

that this question must be answered definitely because a concept of universality is at stake; one which "refers to the size and the nature of the political entity of which we are citizens and one with which...the public sphere must be coterminous"<sup>64</sup>.

Arguably, however, Garnham's insistence on this linear and hierarchical structure only results in an espousal of the Habermasian version of freedom in the public sphere: an "equal" opportunity to compete for access. As a result, Garnham's best suggestion for heightening citizens' communicative freedom in both national public spheres and an as yet to be created international public sphere is to "envisage a situation where any group that could obtain a membership over a certain size would be eligible for regular access to airtime"<sup>65</sup>. This conclusion is echoed by other broadcasting scholars such as Robert Cirino who argues that the answer to more democratic participation and accountability lies in the conversion of public broadcasting from "a paternalistic elite model of management operations...[to] a democratic spectrum sharing model"<sup>66</sup>. To achieve this goal Cirino advocates that the United States adopt a similar broadcasting model to that currently privileged in the Netherlands "wherein each group that is able to gain a certain number of members is allowed a proportionate access to the public broadcasting system, whose board of governors has been chosen from a diverse range of political and social groups"<sup>67</sup>. In the American context, Cirino suggests that this would entail funding a socialist, liberal, conservative and libertarian network which would

form the basis of the American public broadcasting system. In addition to the regular airtime these networks would be given to present their presumably diverse political views, other general interest and culturally specific programs would be solicited from a wide range of citizen groups.

Yet confronted with these models one can legitimately ask: How can public broadcasters become integrative arenas of discursive interaction when their program allocation structurally supports a cacophony of competing monologues rather than continuous and reasonable dialogue? In other words, these spectrum sharing models only reinforce the rifts between the dominant political schools of thought in any given society. Moreover, these models ghettoize citizens whose ideas do not conform readily with those of the majority. Rather than provide opportunities for marginalized groups to directly confront the dominant schools of thought, these models lump them into an "others" category in which they compete amongst themselves for left-over airtime. While minority groups would theoretically be granted equivalent airtime when or if they could demonstrate sufficient popular support, these models serve to naturalize the dominant political groups as the pillars of the public broadcasting system. In the end then, analyses such as Garnham's and Cirino's are simply an apology for the status quo; they provide no viable alternative to counteract inequalities in communicative entitlements amongst citizens.



Such logic thus teaches us that if we wish to envisage more complex networks of freedom and equality both in relation to public broadcasting and the public sphere, we need to reject the tendency to want to comprehensively explain, and ultimately seek to control, the interaction that takes place in these discursive arenas. Instead of attempting to slot both citizens and broadcasters into definitive and hierarchical roles and structures, we need to ask more pertinent questions such as those raised by James Clifford in "Travelling Cultures":

Who determines where (and when) a community draws its lines, names its insiders and outsiders?...How do groups negotiate themselves in external relationships and how is a culture also a site of travel for others? How are spaces traversed from outside? How is one group's core another's periphery?<sup>68</sup>

Although Clifford asks these questions in relation to the discourse and practice of late twentieth century ethnography, they are crucial points of interrogation for our discussion of the interconnectedness of communication networks in a multi-channel and multi-media environment. Even the most preliminary and tentative attempt to answer Clifford's questions in relation to the topic at hand suggests the complex ways in which individuals both as citizens and as audience members seek out and produce the comparative knowledge required to simultaneously ground their existence and free themselves to embrace other realities and/or identities<sup>69</sup>.

Clearly, this thoroughly reflexive process is by no means a linear progression of subsuming one's local to regional to national to international

sensibility. Nor is it simply a stage through which all individuals and groups must pass before eventually overcoming the need to continuously redefine who they are and how their needs and interests interrelate with some notion of a collectivity. Therefore, even while positing national public broadcasters as integrative arenas of discursive interaction and while defining access, specialty service and local broadcast and media outlets as essential access points, it is crucial to keep in mind that these communications networks "do not determine their meaning so much as they delimit the arena of the struggle for that meaning by marking the terrain within which their variety of readings can be negotiated"<sup>70</sup>.

Moreover, even this terrain is contestable. As a result, in the same way that "the question of what constitutes a counterpublic cannot be answered in any singular, foundational manner but is a matter of relationality, of conjunctural shifts and alliances, of making connections with other publics and other types of publicity"<sup>71</sup>, so too is the question of the function of each media outlet. Stated otherwise, each media outlet, regardless of its intended audience or purpose, is simultaneously a viewing margin and a viewing centre, a site of withdrawal and a site of integrated contestation, a "home" network and a travel destination, depending, in part, on the positioning and expectations of the individuals and groups who choose to interact with the system and its content.

For instance, a given access or specialty service broadcaster can be for one individual or group a channel of self-identification and self-reflection while for another individual or group it can be a site of discovery of, or contestation with, "the other". Likewise, national public broadcasters can be simultaneously imagined as integrative discursive arenas at a national level and as access points in an international media environment. The purpose then of trying to define the respective roles and potential contributions of various levels and types of broadcasters or media outlets is not to say that this is the only role each will be allowed to play or the sole contribution each will be allowed to make. Moreover, it is not a question of attempting to ensure that all citizens will recognize or rely on each communication network in the same way; this would not only be impossible, but more importantly, undesirable.

Rather, envisaging complex networks of freedom and equality through communications media entails providing citizens with as many different types and levels of interaction as possible in which to develop the affinities which will enable them to recognize themselves simultaneously as citizens of the world **and** of a nation-state **and** of a community **and** as members of special interests/identity groups. It also entails the recognition that some individuals and groups may decide for varying periods of time that a given medium is not the most conducive or desirable mechanisms for them to access or partake in discursive interaction. These groups should thus have opportunities to contest or redefine the prominence accorded to a given medium as a key site of

discursive interaction.

Failure to envisage the complex and diversified ways in which modern individuals define and express their affinities within a local-global continuum of discursive interaction will also lead to a limited understanding of the strategies citizens use to minimise risk both in their personal lives and on a planetary scale. Such is the case with Garnham whose strategy for minimising risk in modern individuals' lives is based on what he refers to as "rational cynicism"<sup>72</sup>. According to Garnham's argument, individuals should submit themselves to the logic of a global public sphere and accompanying media by adopting a strategy of rational cynicism "which recognizes very clearly the realities of domination but calculates that the risks of change are greater than those of the status quo"<sup>73</sup>. Clearly, this logic is as disempowering and fatalistic as humans' wilful submission to the laws of a free market. Moreover, even if one were to suspend disbelief in order to endorse the strategy of rational cynicism, other conditions -conditions which require the presence and support of the local, specialized and decentralized media outlets that Garnham undercuts would have to be satisfied.

For instance, in order to achieve the goal of translating debate into action either through consensus or majority rule - rather than by means of repression or violence - deliberants in this global arena would have to be willing to exercise their reason to minimize their risks. However, as Paddy Scannell explains, this rationality depends, in part, on participants being willing:

...to listen and to allow for the validity of the other person's viewpoint, and if necessary, be willing to leave aside what may be the best argument...in consideration of the most appropriate decisions in relation to the particular circumstances"<sup>74</sup>.

Significantly, this willingness to accept others' judgement depends, if it is not to become simply a form of irrational subjugation and/or domination, on participants' repeated opportunities to formulate and share their points of view with others. As a result, even a strategy of rational cynicism - were one ready to adopt it - fundamentally depends upon the multiplication of access, specialty service, local public broadcasters and new media outlets which successfully serve as access points to national and global public spheres.

It is important to note that in challenging the hierarchical model of a global public sphere with comprehensive media of similar scale, I am not suggesting that all communication hierarchies and the power relations implicit in them can or must be eliminated to realize the ideal of democratic communication. Rather, I am suggesting that there is a better, and ultimately more productive, means of heightening freedom and equality while minimising risk than Garnham's strategy of rational cynicism or Habermas' strategy of tragic stoicism<sup>75</sup>. It may well be true, as Habermas contends, that the theory of the public sphere "is an attempt to exclude violence, if only to reproduce some sort of violence internally again, but in a criticizable fashion"<sup>76</sup> and that "this may be the best we can achieve in the domain of politics"<sup>77</sup> as well as in the domain of communication. The problem, however, with both Garnham's

and Habermas' strategies to deal with the need to minimise risk is that neither of these strategies empower citizens to combat the irrevocable threat of violence even in its supposedly "criticizable" form.

Yet to allow the irrevocable threat of violence to dictate the conditions for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication is to limit the possibilities of conceptualising different uses for both communication and power other than coercion or domination. As Thomas Goodnight reminds us: "Public discourse emerges out of and fashions public time and space. By reconstructing or redirecting its temporal and spatial options, a community recomposes its social constraints and possibilities"<sup>78</sup>. What is urgently required, therefore, is a strategy which can account for the need to both interlace local and global connections in complex fashions and minimize the threat of violence on a personal and planetary scale.

#### Applying utopian realism to national public broadcasting

One strategy that may begin to address these concerns is Anthony Giddens' strategy of utopian realism. This strategy holds that the ability to harness power effectively to minimize high consequence risk and secure greater freedom and equality for all citizens fundamentally depends on a recognition of the inextricable linkage between emancipatory and life politics, and between local and global decision-making processes. It thus seeks to understand the juxtapositions and contradictions and heighten the interconnections between individual benefit and planetary organization and

between "radical engagement concerned with liberation from inequality or servitude"<sup>79</sup> (emancipatory politics) and "radical engagement which seeks to further the possibilities of a fulfilling and satisfying life for all"<sup>80</sup> (life politics).

As Giddens readily admits, there is "no point pretending that this [strategy] does not rest on cultural commitment and power"<sup>81</sup>. Rather, Giddens' strategy which could potentially guide the (re)definition of the roles and responsibilities of public broadcasters in a multi-channel and multi-media environment:

...recognises the inevitability of power and does not see its uses as inherently noxious. Power, in its broadest sense, is a means of getting things done. In a situation of accelerating globalisation, seeking to maximise opportunity to minimise high consequence risks certainly depends upon the coordinated use of power...and it would be shortsighted indeed to be sanguine about how far agencies of concentrated power would participate in furthering trends which might undermine their position...Yet power is not always used for sectional gains or as a medium of oppression, and the element of realism retains its centrality<sup>82</sup>.

According to this logic, realizing the ideal of democratic communication does not necessitate the elimination of, or refusal to exercise, power -- were that even possible -- but rather, it requires the coordinated and varied use of power.

Insofar as national public broadcasters are concerned, this means that to argue over whether national programming should have priority over regional and local programming or whether national interests and identity should take precedent over regionalized interests or identities, is to become preoccupied with a false debate. Rather than privilege planetary organization at the expense

of individual benefit or emancipatory politics at the expense of life politics, national public broadcasters should, in keeping with the strategy of utopian realism, seek to multiply the intersections and linkages amongst the various levels and types of media outlets. In so doing, national public broadcasters would contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which each media outlet fashions and enhances the significance of the others thereby fulfilling often complex and contradictory human needs and expectations.

In emphasizing national public broadcasters' potential to highlight and reinforce the coordinated use of power amongst media outlets, I am not suggesting that national public broadcasters should be the arbitrators or guarantors of balance in their respective broadcasting systems. In fact, as Peter Cook and Myles Ruggles vigorously argue in "Balance and Freedom of Speech: Challenge for Canadian Broadcasting", appeals for 'balance' in national and regional programming priorities will in no way ensure greater equality and freedom for most citizens:

...there is manifestly no scale or reference mark that assures people with opposing interests that an equilibrium has been reached in the way that a butcher's scale satisfies both the seller and the buyer that a quantity of meat weighs a pound...The use of the terms 'balance' in political and legal rhetoric exemplifies a categorization that makes an effective appeal because it presents itself as descriptive rather than polemical. It is another instance of government language that is preeminently a means of inducing acquiescence in deprivation and of stilling the qualms of those who benefit<sup>83</sup>.

Since emphasis on "balance" in both broadcast programming and system



administration is ultimately "an appeal for support, not a form of measurement"<sup>84</sup> and since balance can at best be defined as the "constant relationship between moving parts"<sup>85</sup>, attempts to legislate balance in the realm of broadcasting are ultimately counter-productive to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication.

Rather, individuals and groups must assume responsibility for seeking their own "balance" between national and regional programming, between public and private stations, between information and entertainment fare and between television and other media. As for national public broadcasters, their contribution to the development of more complex networks of freedom and equality lies not in achieving "balanced" programming, but in their ability to increase various individuals' and groups' opportunities to simultaneously cultivate the degree of self-identification and ontological security they require to participate in public debates and decision-making processes. National public broadcasters' priorities must therefore shift from an emphasis on balance to an emphasis on "extending sensibility -- local, regional and national"<sup>86</sup>.

In other words, if voluntary freedom is to be enhanced, public broadcasters can no longer attempt to "dictate the sensibility from the centre"<sup>87</sup>. In legislative terms, this means, as Anthony Smith explains in "The Public Interest", that:

...government has a responsibility to regulate in such a way as to multiply the possibilities of interconnections of all kinds. Rather than acting as a kind of marshal between systems, it has, in the new environment, to ensure that systems exist in fruitful mutual juxtaposition<sup>88</sup>.

In programming terms, this means that public broadcasters must define their role as an integrative space of discursive interaction in such a way that recognizes the vital contribution of local, specialty and decentralized networks of communication in enhancing cross-cultural and cross-regional sensibilities.

In particular, national public broadcasters must identify and work in collaboration with those communications networks that continuously and repeatedly lay the groundwork which enables citizens both as viewers of, and participants in, national public broadcasting programming and administration, to pass from what Clifford Geertz describes as "the immediacies of one form of life to the metaphors of another"<sup>89</sup>. In order to repeatedly and continuously make this essential transition, public broadcasting in collaboration with other media outlets would have to become "a theatre in which this cultural diversity is produced, displayed and represented and a forum in which the terms of its associative life together are negotiated"<sup>90</sup>. The end result of this process would be, as Tosten Hagerstrand explains:

...the amplification of internal flow of communication [both] in [and between] regions and localities in order to enhance cross-sectoral and environmental understanding, mutual aid and cooperation and establish a platform for public debate and distinctive expression<sup>91</sup>.

All public communications networks, regardless of the territory, subject matter or intended audience would thus be engaged in a symbiotic relationship; a situation of mutual interdependence and responsibility.

As Stuart Hall rightly notes, the rationale underlying this vision of a public media network is that "broadcasting policy and practice have a clear and important role to play both in recognising difference and independence and in encouraging integration and inter-dependence"<sup>92</sup>. For, if the centripetal/centrifugal dynamic of integrative arenas of discursive interaction is allowed to quash counter-public expression, then as Kevin Robins and David Morley fear "we find ourselves defending national cultures as the basis of cultural diversity and albeit reluctantly supporting national sovereignty as a bulwark against global standardization and homogenization"<sup>93</sup>. Conversely, if the decentralist dynamic of counter-public media is allowed to dictate the direction and scope of integrative arenas of discursive interaction such as national public broadcasting, then we may, as William Gilsdorf fears, find ourselves devoid:

...of one of the most important vehicles for arbitration between groups and interests...the basic tool kit of any political entity larger than a municipal council: the power to set one's own agenda, one's own parameters of debate and gather world information according to one's national priorities and interests<sup>94</sup>.

It is thus crucial to understand that the sensibility required to enhance interconnectedness of all kinds cannot be dictated from either the centre or the regions; it must emanate from, and reverberate through as many different types and levels of communication networks as possible.

Yet even the recognition of the interconnectedness and mutually accountable nature of the relationships amongst communications networks will

not create a clear-cut path for national public broadcasters. As John Keane explains, even societies which seek to realize the ideal of democratic communication implicit in the public broadcasting project, will "surely suffer from ongoing jurisdictional conflicts such as whether broadcasting should be controlled locally or defined territorially or based upon relatively homogeneous ethnic, cultural, economic or political identities"<sup>95</sup>. What is not in doubt, however, is that:

...through their capacity to transgress frontiers and subvert territories [the communications media] are implicated in a complex interplay of de-territorialization and re-territorialization... The question, therefore, is how network and community can be reconciled<sup>96</sup>.

Arguably, this reconciliation begins with the effort of all media outlets, including national public broadcasters, to resist the temptation to become "territorializing machines"<sup>97</sup>.

According to Lawrence Grossberg, "a territorializing machine attempts to map the sorts of places people can occupy and how they can occupy them. It maps how much room people have to move and where and how they can move"<sup>98</sup>. Admittedly, this tendency towards territorialization is increasingly thwarted by "the accelerated process of transnationalization [which] makes it difficult to ground a concept of the public in any territorial entity, be it local, regional or national"<sup>99</sup>. Nevertheless, once one accepts both the necessity of a multiplicity of media outlets and the fact that their respective roles can never be determined once and for all, the real challenge becomes, as Michael Warner

notes, to ensure that "the mediating rhetorical dimension of a public context is built into each individual's relation to it, as a meaningful reference point against which something could be grasped as information, discussion and will formation"<sup>100</sup>.

## END NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

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81. Giddens, op.cit., p. 176.
82. Ibid., p. 162.
83. Peter Cook and Myles Ruggles, "Balance and Freedom of Speech: Challenge for Canadian Broadcasting" in Canadian Journal of Communication, Vol. 17, 1992, p. 54.
84. Ibid., p. 54.
85. Allan Thomas, "Audience, Market and Public - An Evaluation of Canadian Broadcasting" in Canadian Communications, Vol. 1, 1960, p. 41.
86. Daryl Duke, "Programmed to Fail" in The Canadian Forum, March 1993, p. 18. In this article Duke explains that "Canadians of different races and ethnic origins have the right to see their cultures portrayed as part of Canada's mainstream television, not marginalized or belittled by being restricted to a multicultural cable channel. Those of us in the dominant English culture have as well the right to experience the cultures of the totality of Canadians who live among us".

87. Ibid., p. 18.
88. Anthony Smith, "The Public Interest" in Intermedia, Vol. 17(2), 1989, p. 24.
89. Clifford Geertz, "Found in Translation: Social History of the Moral Imagination" in Local Knowledge, (New York: Basic Books), 1983, p. 48.
90. Stuart Hall as quoted by Kevin Robins and David Morley, "Euroculture: Communications, Community and Identity in Europe" in Cardozo Arts and Entertainment, Vol. 11, 1993, p. 44.
91. Hagerstrand, op.cit., p. 19.
92. Stuart Hall as quoted by Robins and Morley, op.cit., p. 47.
93. Robins and Morley, Ibid., p. 400.
94. William Gilsdorf, "CBC television and the 1988 Canadian federal election: Journalistic practice in a North American context" in Small Nations. Big Neighbour: Denmark and Quebec/Canada Compare Notes on American Popular Culture, (John Libbey & Company Ltd: London, England), 1993, p. 95.
95. John Keane, Media and Democracy, op.cit., p. 191.
96. Robins and Morley, op.cit., p. 395.
97. Lawrence Grossberg as quoted by Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric" in Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 81, 1995, p. 305.
98. Ibid., p. 305.
99. Hansen, op.cit., p. xiii.
100. Michael Warner in Calhoun, op.cit., p. 379.

## REDEFINING "THE PUBLIC" AND "THE AUDIENCE" IN CANADIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

In Chapter 2, I argued that Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere rests on an unnecessary and ultimately counter-productive separation of public and private realms. As I noted, this distinction was sustained in the bourgeois public sphere by the conflation of *bourgeois* with *homme*. According to Habermas' account, property owners in the bourgeois public sphere could forego their individual interests in order to debate matters of "public" concern, and thus achieve consensus on "public" goods. Property owners' ability to assume this new role was heralded by Habermas as a victory for the disenfranchised over the forces of mercantilism and absolutist rule. However, as I demonstrated, the logic of abstraction required to maintain what Habermas himself concedes was a fiction, lead first to self-alienation and then to self-deception in minority and dominant groups alike. I therefore concluded that the overriding concern in public sphere deliberations was not, as Habermas insisted, how to eliminate private interests and identities from the debate. Rather, the key concern should be to determine means and avenues for all participants to link their individual and group interests and identities to socially useful action.

In this chapter, I will argue that the same faulty conflation and logic underlying the Habermasian conception of the bourgeois public sphere also plagues traditional understanding of national public broadcasting. In

establishing this critique, I will answer the following questions. First, which faulty conflation has marred the effectiveness of public broadcasting as a mediating instrument of socially useful action? Second, given public broadcasters' consistent attempts to subsume private interests to public goals and goods, what types of self-alienation and self-deception has their programming and administration fostered? Third, how must the two discursive entities which fuel all broadcasting debates, "the public" and "the audience", be re-conceptualized in order to free both producers and consumers of public broadcasting from this stifling assumption? Fourth, how can a revised understanding of public broadcasters' role enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to the process of linking and relinking individuals' and groups' interests with those of the societies in which they operate? And finally, what communicative ethics is required to realize the ideal of democratic communication and how can public broadcasters' programming best contribute to this goal? I explore these questions by examining a particular set of circumstances: those involving the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. While there are no definitive, transcultural answers to the questions I raise, I expect my observations to reverberate forcefully, though not identically, in other countries whose national public broadcasters have fallen prey to the same problematic assumption.

To begin, I explore the parallel between Habermas' conflation of *bourgeois* and *homme* and Canadian nationalists' conflation of their interests

with those of the public. Using examples from Canadian public broadcasting programming and policy, I suggest how and why this conflation has persisted to this day. I also demonstrate how this conflation of nationalist and public interests circumvents meaningful debate which can lead to socially useful action. I conclude that this conflation must be further problematized, rather than naturalized, because it tends not only to sideline the majority of the public, but all but negate the audience.

Next, I consider the effects of the strict insistence on the separation of public and private interests and identities which result from the internalization of this assumption. I demonstrate that the same rhetoric of disincorporation required to deliberate in Habermas' public sphere is a prerequisite for entry into Canadian public broadcasting decision-making and programming. The fact that this rhetorical tool is an unequally available resource, which in the Canadian context, particularly privileges political and cultural elites, is only a residual effect of a much larger and more serious problem. The main reason that this artificial and arbitrary separation of public and private interests and identities must be overcome is that it creates and sustains a regime of self-alienated and self-deceived subjects among all citizens, regardless of their nationalist convictions.

Consequently, I argue that eliminating the problematic assumption which in the Canadian broadcasting context is at the root of the conflation of nationalist and public goals, and by extension, of consumer capitalist interests

with those of the audience, is crucial if the CBC is to contribute significantly to democratic communication. To this end, I reconsider the concept, the role and the power traditionally attributed to "the public" and "the audience" respectively. I contend that only once these discursive entities are understood as different, yet countersecting forces can they be transformed from rhetorical tools which promote self-alienation and self-deception into rhetorical tools which foster the communicative ethics required to realize the ideal of democratic communication.

#### The conflation of Canadian nationalist and "public" interests

Arguably, like propertied males in the bourgeois public sphere who equated their class interests with those of society in general, Canadian political and cultural nationalists have assumed, since the advent of public broadcasting in Canada, that their goals with regards to broadcasting were coterminous with those of "the public". As a result, since the first Canadian Broadcasting Act received royal assent in 1932, public broadcasting has been integrally and repeatedly linked with the protection and promotion of national unity and national identity. Canadian nationalists' unwavering faith in public broadcasting's ability and responsibility to unite the country was only strengthened by the introduction of television into Canadian society in 1952. While nationalists' confidence in the pervasive force of public broadcasting to promote unity and protect Canadian identity was extended to both radio and television, the latter was believed to have a greater impact and leave a more

permanent imprint on the Canadian psyche. This sweeping nationalist rhetoric thus led former CBC chairman Alphonse Ouimet to declare that "the long term input of television on national identity is greater than that of all media combined"<sup>1</sup>.

How and why has this equation of Canadian nationalists' interests with those of the public persisted in relation to Canadian public broadcasting decision-making and programming? In the bourgeois public sphere, the conflation between *bourgeois* and *homme* was facilitated above all by the fact that bourgeois interests were seemingly premised on, and contributed to, an indisputable goal shared by all citizens, that of the political emancipation of civil society. Likewise, Canadian nationalists' conflation of their interests with those of the public has been primarily fuelled by the fact that their stated goals (national unity, a collective consciousness and cultural and political sovereignty) were presumed to be unquestionable assumptions espoused by all Canadian citizens. As J.K. Galbraith notes in The Culture of Contentment, the presumption that one's views or aspirations as a member of a dominant group are shared by society as a whole, is commonplace:

...individuals and communities that are favoured in their economic, social and political conditions attribute social virtue and political desirability to that which they themselves enjoy...There is an eager political market for that which pleases and reassures<sup>2</sup>.

Yet while Canadian nationalists' extension of their goals and goods to those of society at large may differ little from the actions of other political and cultural



elites, this conflation is no less perverse.

The problem with nationalists' interpretation of Canadian public broadcasting as an instrument of political and cultural cohesion, is that in the name of their nationalist interests they have repeatedly defined Canadian public broadcasting within the narrow boundaries of that which promotes national unity, ensures consensus and fosters a collective consciousness. As a result, like the bourgeois class interests which were freed *a priori* from public scrutiny and contestation, Canadian public broadcasting's potential and anticipated contribution to national unity and cultural identity has always been posited as a given. As Gregory Jusdanis explains in Beyond National Culture, the unequivocal linkage of cultural institutions to the promotion and protection of political unity is a fundamental premise that underlies all nationalist thought:

National culture secures...a coexistence between state and society; nationalism itself being a program to obtain and use state power. Through nationalism, culture acquiesces a spatial scope (planting it in the native soil) and a political dimension (connecting it to the state). In short, nationalism holds that political and cultural boundaries should be congruent and that cultural unity should exist between rulers and the ruled<sup>3</sup>.

This linkage, combined with the fact that "cultural nationalism often presents itself as biological, a matter of blood"<sup>4</sup> rather than as a matter of invention, makes the conflation of nationalist and public interests seem involuntary and unalterable. This conflation thus becomes the premise from which decisions are taken, a naturalized element of the Canadian public broadcasting landscape.

The degree to which nationalists' interests have been naturalized as a given in all public broadcasting decision-making and programming is succinctly captured in the reaction of former Secretary of State, Judy LaMarsh, to opposition to the inclusion of the mandate to promote national unity in the 1968 Broadcasting Act. As LaMarsh notes in her autobiography, Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage:

When the Broadcasting Bill had first been tabled, the French network producers telegraphed me protesting a clause which spelled out, for the first time in unequivocally clear words, that one of the CBC's roles was to foster national unity. The charge made, in which some of the Quebec press joined, was that this was tantamount to censorship by the Government. How anyone could seriously question this as a primary aim of a Crown corporation paid for by all the taxpayers of Canada, I do not know<sup>5</sup>.

That LaMarsh is unwilling to even entertain the possibility that such a mandate might be perceived as anything less than universally endorsed by Canadian citizens suggests the extent to which this assumption was naturalized by Canadian nationalists as an integral element of Canadian political reality.

This naturalization process is also evident in that whenever Canadian identity or political sovereignty has been threatened, the general nationalist tendency has been to almost automatically assume that the CBC failed in its mandate to promote cultural cohesiveness and political unity. For instance, after the unexpected election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, allegations were rampant that the CBC, particularly the French-language division, had engaged in subversive reporting which undermined the political future of Canada. Then

Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, convinced of the CBC's failure to promote the nationalist goals, ordered a full-scale investigation into the status of Canadian public television newscasts<sup>6</sup>. The CBC was similarly chastised in 1991 for its coverage of the Meech Lake Accord negotiations. In this instance, however, since nationalists themselves were divided on whether the ratification of the Accord was in the best interest of national unity, the CBC was simultaneously accused of being involved in a conscious conspiracy to ensure the survival of the nation and of surreptitiously scuttling constitutional reforms<sup>7</sup>. The most recent attack on the CBC came from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who argued that the public broadcaster was partly responsible for the near break-up of the country during the 1995 Quebec Referendum campaign. Significantly, in the aftermath of these national crises, the tendency has simply been to attempt to repair the perceived breakdown in the public broadcasting system rather than to fundamentally rethink its role and responsibility to promote national unity and a collective consciousness.

As a result, nationalist interests have not only been fundamentally naturalized in the legislation of the broad terms of the CBC's mandate. They also have radically, though somewhat less inconspicuously, defined the regulatory framework of specific programs, particularly news and public affairs shows. As Marc Raboy notes, the CBC's internalization of the underlying nationalist interests that public broadcasting should contribute to national unity, not fragmentation, and national consensus, not contestation, has "...led to

bizarre incidents such as keeping the cameras trained on the parade at the 1968 Saint-Jean Baptiste Day celebrations in Montreal while police and demonstrators fought a bloody battle on the sidelines"<sup>8</sup>. Similar logic was again adopted during the FLQ crisis when the CBC was "ordered to play down military intervention that had preceded the introduction of the War Measures Act...and when [journalists] were refused permission to cover events involving groups opposed to the government actions"<sup>9</sup>. When the union representing Radio-Canada's journalists tried to alert the public to this managerial and government interference in the provision of news and information, "... the two main spokesmen for the union, journalists Michel Bourdon and Denis Vincent, were fired for insubordination"<sup>10</sup>. Notably, however, the conflation of nationalist interests with those of the public has not only been used to censor Québécois separatist manifestations.

Other events and ideas which were potentially threatening to national unity and identity have also lead to political interference by the government of the day and self-censorship by the CBC. For instance, during the conscription plebiscite of 1942, nationalists' conflation of their interests with those of the public were used to rationalize the federal government's instructions that only federal political parties were to be granted CBC air time to state their case regarding conscription to the Canadian public. That all four parties were in favour of conscription and that such an ordinance would effectively silence all opposition on the public airwaves was conveniently

downplayed. Given the blatant monologue over the conscription crisis that would result from this ordinance, the *Ligue pour la défense du Canada* requested permission to present the views of those opposed to conscription. The league's request was flatly refused by the CBC. As a result, in order to be heard, those who disagreed with the nationalist stance had to purchase air time on private networks<sup>11</sup>. Another example involves the coverage of then Minister of External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson's visit to the Soviet Union in 1957. As Paul Rutherford relates in When Television Was Young: Prime Time Canada 1952-1957, "...the CBC suppressed a report by Levesque that Lester Pearson...had been savaged by Soviet leader Khrushchev because the news reflected badly on the government and on Canada"<sup>12</sup>.

While many of the examples cited above date from earlier days of radio and television broadcasts, nationalists' grip on public broadcasting decision-making and programming is not confined to the past. Despite the fact that the CBC's mandate to promote national unity was dropped as a formal requirement in the 1991 Broadcasting Act, this conflation persists. For example, a 1991 internal CBC memo which established guidelines for the coverage of ongoing constitutional debates clearly suggests that this conflation continues to dictate public broadcasting decision-making and programming. As Jean-François Lisée, a prominent journalist and Québécois separatist writes:

Parmi les perles de ce document, on trouve la directive voulant que les émissions d'affaires publiques (comme le Point ou Aujourd'hui dimanche) 'doivent refléter le Canada comme nation et évoquer les avantages sociaux,

économiques, culturels et politiques apportés à chacun d'entre nous au fil des ans, par l'appartenance à la communauté canadienne'. 'Il faut', ajoute le document, 'également dépeindre les tensions', mais seulement 'en vue de les réduire'. La directive ne parle pas d'évoquer de possibles désavantages à l'appartenance au Canada<sup>13</sup>.

Notably, in each of the cases cited above, the plausible and worthwhile idea that deliberation could lead to the espousal of common goods such as national unity and the realization of common action through national consensus is misconstrued because it is assumed that the deliberation had to be deliberation about a predetermined common good, rather than deliberation to determine or fashion the common good.

#### Nationalists' predetermination of the common good

In attempting to limit the range of acceptable topics and frameworks for discussion, political and cultural nationalists have thus continuously circumvented and undermined the conditions required to realize the ideal of democratic communication. As Edwin R. Black explains in "Canadian Public Policy and the Mass Media":

What they seek to do often without quite realizing it, is to change the conditions of the contest, to restrict the boundaries of the forum or to turn Canadian consumers of mass communications into something of a captive market for the national good<sup>14</sup>.

This cooption should not come as a surprise given that nationalism is premised on "a practice of promoting the collective interests of the national community or state **above** those of individuals, regions, special interests or other

nations"<sup>15</sup>. Ironically, however, in attempting to confine public broadcasting to this limited discursive space, Canadian nationalists have worked against their own objectives insofar as they have made it more difficult for Canadians to voice and explore other potential ways and means of understanding and achieving the cultural and political solidarity nationalists seek.

For nationalist aspirations to be fully endorsed by citizens, they must be freely adopted by individuals who have been given the opportunity to independently determine their worth and their applicability to their daily lives. The easy consensus that the conflation of nationalist interests with those of the public sustains must therefore be disturbed because it ultimately undermines and paralyses human agency. Like Habermas, who believed that deliberants in the bourgeois public sphere initially preoccupied with the expression of their own novel privateness could transcend this stage once and for all to debate matters of common concern, Canadian nationalists have assumed that having formally agreed that public broadcasting should contribute to nationalist goals, citizens would no longer seek to reconsider, redefine or refashion these goals in light of their individual experiences or needs. Both these conflations, however, are premised on "a paradigm whose guarantees are already inscribed in the knowledge it produces"<sup>16</sup>.

Like Habermas, what Canadian nationalists have failed to understand is that the fashioning of political and cultural cohesion, together with all other common goods, is inevitably and necessarily an on-going and unpredictable

dialogical process. As Ross Eaman notes, Canadian nationalists' failure to acknowledge that national unity, culture and identity are created and recreated by self-reflexive and autonomous citizens is further evidenced in that:

There is little mention in their [Canadian nationalists] writing and speeches of the fact that culture is created by all members of society. It is, however, only through the activity itself of producing a culture that identities emerge, whatever the level of culture...to become part of a society's culture, new ways of thinking or behaving must be selected and sanctioned by its members as helping them to understand and deal with their own experiences...a country can scarcely be expected to have a substantial and secure national identity if the mass of the people lack the means to influence its creative sources<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, the conflation of Canadian nationalist and public interests not only limits individuals' autonomy but also their ability to discover and develop the sympathy required to recognize the interconnectedness of their life goals and goods with those of the nation.

The sense of sympathy required to create a truly active national community must be fashioned by individuals and groups who, given the opportunity to explore and express their identities and interests in all their dazzling plurality, recognize elements of themselves in others and freely choose to establish personal and political connections in order to achieve goals that they would be incapable of realizing on their own. As Theodore Glasser explains in "Communication and the Cultivation of Citizenship":

What ultimately informs this explicitly public role for communication is a sense of sympathy that regards individuality and sociability as complementary...With sympathy as its guiding principle politics and the consensus



it requires can be truly 'creative'...in the sense of being actively fashioned: an agreement that arises out of 'common talk, common decision, and common work' and is 'premised on citizens' active and perennial participation in the transformation of conflict through the creation of common consciousness and political judgement<sup>18</sup>.

To assume *a priori* that nationalist interests are coterminous with those of the public radically undermines, and at times negates, the possibility of generating solidarity based on sympathy, rather than on ideological or hegemonic coercion or control.

As a result, espousal of the nationalists' logic is self-defeating for those citizens who do not share the nationalists' vision because it compels them to accept a public broadcasting system whose explicit mandate naturalizes and thus subverts the opportunities to contest the nationalists' definition and delimitation of the national good. These citizens often find that their interventions both about and within public broadcasting are constrained *a priori* to those that conform to the language and rationale of nationalist thought. Significantly, however, this logic is also counterproductive to nationalists' aspirations insofar as any admission on their part that the system is based on their specific interests is impossible without exposing the conditions and surrendering the privilege according to which their interests were granted primary legitimacy in the first place. Those who readily adopt the Canadian nationalist stance are thus denied the opportunity to reconsider or imagine anew the uses to which public broadcasting might best be put in light of ever changing local and global circumstances. In the end then, the conflation of

nationalist and public interests makes the process of envisaging new roles and definitions of public broadcasting more difficult for all intervenors and reduces the likelihood that alternative courses of action will be given a fair hearing.

Therefore, instead of viewing citizens as a captive market for the national good, members of any given society should be understood to be what C. Gould has defined as "individuals in relations"<sup>19</sup>. The underlying assumption of this definition is that human beings are individuals "who gain their identity through social interaction"<sup>20</sup>. According to this view, as Richard Bernstein explains: "...to say that members of a society are bound by a sense of community is not to say that a great many of them profess communitarian sentiments and pursue communitarian aims"<sup>21</sup>. Rather, to subscribe to this understanding of the ways in which citizens determine national goals and goods is to suggest that citizens' sense of community is enacted and reenacted when "they conceive their identity - the subject and not just the object of their feelings and aspirations as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part"<sup>22</sup>. This process is a dynamic and diachronic one; not one that clings resolutely to the status quo by limiting the realm and the possibility of questioning previously defined national goals and goods.

Crucially, the failure to recognize citizens as individuals in relations denies Canadians the right to determine for themselves which goals and goods should fuel not only the administration of public broadcasting, but the administration of society as a whole. By limiting its discursive realm to nationalist sanctioned

topics and frameworks, public broadcasting is reduced to an ideological tool wielded by nationalists to constrain and contract the sphere of public debate, while purporting to expand it. Yet if the ideal of democratic communication is to be realized, and if, as I have argued public broadcasting is to become an integrative arena of discursive interaction, the process of defining and delimiting national goals and goods is one in which all citizens must have ample and repeated opportunity to participate. The challenge then, as Robert Jusdanis argues, is:

...to develop a relationship between ethnicity and power, culture and the state that would not reproduce the national model...The affirmation of identity, so necessary for the excluded and the silenced, must be accompanied by a discourse on governance<sup>23</sup>.

However, for Canadians to reinvent their relationships within both public broadcasting and the public sphere by linking identity formation processes to participatory democracy, they must first free themselves from the logic of abstraction and the rhetoric of disincorporation which currently dictates their interaction with and within the CBC.

#### The logic of abstraction and the rhetoric of disincorporation

Arguably, the same logic of abstraction and rhetoric of disincorporation described by Michael Warner in his analysis of the bourgeois public sphere is also a prerequisite for deliberations about and within Canadian public broadcasting. Moreover, this rhetoric of disincorporation that Warner suggests led to self-alienation and self-deception in the bourgeois public sphere, leads to

similar results within the CBC. The difference, however, between the bourgeois public sphere and Canadian public broadcasting as arenas of discursive interaction is that the latter grants particular privilege to those who share Canadian nationalists' assumptions and aspirations. Those who do not espouse the nationalists' stance and yet wish to participate in public broadcasting discussions must therefore adopt the rhetoric of disincorporation to the extent which they are able given the "humiliating positivity"<sup>24</sup> of their particular identities and interests.

One example will have to suffice to demonstrate how this logic of abstraction with its accompanying rhetoric of disincorporation has undermined the democratic potential of public broadcasting in the Canadian context. This example is particularly pertinent because it reveals the extent to which even those who are assumed to be in a position of privilege in relation to Canadian public broadcasting are ultimately self-deceived and rendered discursively impotent as a result of their internalization of this logic and their recourse to this rhetoric. The individuals in question are CBC news journalists and producers.

It could easily be argued that CBC news journalists and producers enjoy a privileged position in the delimitation and the determination of national goals and goods. They are the people who are entrusted with the daily decisions as to which events and individuals will acquire the status of news and which issues of civic concern will merit analysis across public time and space. In a

certain sense then, they are among the public guardians of reality, a commodity which James Carey has characterized as "a scarce resource"<sup>25</sup>. As Carey notes:

Like any scarce resource, it is there to be struggled over, allocated to various purposes and projects, endowed with given meanings and potentials, spent and conserved, rationalized and distributed. The fundamental form of power is the power to define, allocate and display this resource<sup>26</sup>.

CBC news journalists and producers thus wield a powerful tool and play a crucial role as guardians of this public resource. Ironically, however, despite their position of privilege in delimiting and determining the realm and topics of discussion to be sanctioned, CBC news journalists' and producers' attempts to circumvent nationalists' cooption of Canadian public broadcasting has only led them to more fully commit to the ultimately disempowering logic of abstraction and its accompanying rhetoric of disincorporation.

Admittedly, this rhetoric of disincorporation, more commonly known in the realm of broadcasting as journalistic objectivity or professionalism, protects journalists' and producers' privileged access to, and delimitation of, national goals and goods. Insofar as this rhetoric masks news journalists' and producers' role as knowledge-brokers in the public sphere, it enables them to deny - or at the very least to distance themselves from the need to admit - their individual subjectivity with regards to broadcast decision-making. As Paul Rutherford explains, in the early years of television, the CBC considered itself to be "...reasonably safe as long as it adhered to its policies of impartiality and

balance...the Talks and Public Affairs Dept. kept lists to prove that topics selected and the speakers invited conformed to the rules of balance"<sup>27</sup>. Over the years this rhetoric of self-abstraction has continued to provide a strong corporate and journalistic defense against public criticism and controversy.

Yet contrary to journalists' and producers' expectations, recourse to this rhetoric has not provided a safeguard against nationalists' cooption of public broadcasting programming and administration. CBC news journalists and producers have been self-deceived if they believe that they have eliminated personal interests - including their own - from public broadcasting. The rhetoric of disincorporation which has been their shield against charges of bias or political subversion has only naturalized the nationalists' unmarked identities and interests to such an extent that they are now recognized and contested with difficulty. As Marc Raboy writes, the end result is thus that with CBC news journalists' and producers' unwitting complicity, public broadcasting:

...could only with great difficulty be used for building a sense of community at any level other than the national one and in no case could it be used for building an alternative solidarity that could be perceived as threatening to Canadian national unity<sup>28</sup>.

CBC news journalists' and producers' recourse to the rhetoric of disincorporation has thus resulted in a vicious circle of self-deception. To free themselves from the logic of abstraction which has naturalized nationalists' interests, CBC news journalists and producers would have to surrender, or at least publicly and continuously problematize, their privileged roles as mediators

of public goods and interests.

In suggesting how the conflation of nationalists' and public interests leads to self-deception amongst CBC journalists and producers, I am not implying that they are perpetually unable to free themselves from the nationalist mould. I am arguing, however, that their recourse to the rhetoric of disincorporation further naturalizes both their own, and nationalist interests and thus, at best marginalizes, and at worst silences, ideas which fundamentally conflict with the nationalist agenda. While the reinforced conflation of nationalist and public interests that results from news professionals' internalization of the logic of abstraction protects their position of privilege, it is ultimately disempowering since it undermines all participants' (even CBC news journalists' and producers') ability to question and reinvent their relationships both with and within public broadcasting. As Peter Dahlgren explains:

Such constricted perceptions of the public... deflect sociological awareness away from a number of salient issues. Among them how publics are constituted, the media's role in the process, the nature of the social bonds between members of the public and the ways in which journalism and other media output help or hinder in stimulating dialogue and debate.<sup>29</sup>

Dahlgren is quick to add that, insofar as "journalism is embedded in and largely contextualized by the other media output with which it appears"<sup>30</sup>, all public broadcasting is similarly sacrificed. This conclusion is echoed by James Curran. He argues that given that "entertainment can provide a way of exploring,

experimenting with and expressing a concept of self in relation to others (Whom am I like, whom do I identify with, whom do I have a shared interest with?)"<sup>31</sup>, the reproduction of this conflation in drama and other entertainment programming also has important political consequences.

### Towards a new definition of "the audience" and "the public"

To better understand and ultimately eliminate the faulty confluences which have marred Canadian public broadcasting's potential contribution to the mediation of private interests and socially useful action, we must reconsider the concept, the role and the power of "the public" and "the audience" as defined from the Canadian perspective. Given that I have already addressed the conflation of nationalists' interests with those of the public in depth, this section will focus primarily on the second problematic conflation, that of consumer capitalists' interests with those of the audience. Of particular concern is the way in which this second conflation has helped to sustain the first. Both these confluences kick-start a process of self-alienation, one which leads to self-deception and fragmentation of the self according to artificially sustained "public" vs. "private"; "public" vs. "audience"; and "citizen" vs. "consumer" dichotomies.

Alan Thomas' observations in his 1960 article "Audience, Market and Public"<sup>32</sup> are a useful starting point for this discussion. Thomas begins his article with the recognition that "there is nowhere apparent any clear statement of the relationship between owner, producer and viewer or listener, even



though this relationship, or assumptions about it, underlies every other statement or policy"<sup>33</sup>. The purpose of his article, therefore, is to distinguish clearly what he believes to be the three key forces which have dominated Canadian broadcasting to date, namely the market, the public and the audience. Of particular concern for Thomas is the lack of attention dedicated to an understanding of the audience. In his view, "...in failing to understand and explore the nature of the Audience we have prevented broadcasting from playing its full role, and thus hampered the free and democratic development of the country"<sup>34</sup>.

In making this argument, Thomas establishes an important distinction between the public and the audience. According to Thomas, the key characteristics of the public insofar as Canadian broadcasting is concerned are as follows:

The Public is...the nation, acting in all its local, regional or national forms, but basically committed to the governing not of a people, but of a territory within which citizenship or membership is guaranteed...It tends to be less active and responsible than we would like it to be; and much less active than the market. It tends to be largely defensive and conservative in its actions, more ready to protect than to advance<sup>35</sup>.

Thomas' definition succinctly captures the crucial problem with traditional discursive notions of the public in the Canadian context. Rather than be the nation governing over territorial or abstract systems that only treat people instrumentally, the public should reflect the needs and interests of active individuals engaged in self-reflexive processes of discursive interaction.

In contrast with the public, Thomas posits the audience as a more active than passive force, that is basically private in nature. Its primary activity, according to Thomas, "is that of learning how to evaluate claims for attention"<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, as Thomas explains, the audience is in direct conflict with the public insofar as the "practices acceptable both to the Market and the Audience, seem unacceptable to the Public in the realm of politics"<sup>37</sup>. Thomas thus contends that Canadian public broadcasting proponents should focus on the need to "accept and develop the Audience and bring about the creation of a new more active Public, rather than permitting one to limit and frustrate the potentialities of the other"<sup>38</sup>.

As Thomas notes, one of the difficulties in accepting and developing the audience has been the tendency for successive royal commissions to hear submissions from the public, and on that basis, determine whether the audience was sufficiently well served by Canadian broadcasting. This repeated submission of the needs and interests of the audience to the imperatives of the public explains in part the paradoxical conclusions of numerous royal commissions which found the public to be vociferously in favour of Canadian programs, despite the fact that the audience continued to consume American programs in droves<sup>39</sup>. It is in this sense then, that Alan Thomas' emphasis on the need to allow for the acceptance and development of the audience becomes pivotal to public broadcasting decision-making. As Thomas explains, the CBC has been so fearful that its mandate would be corrupted by too direct

a solicitation of the audience or linkage with consumption that "if there could be found no audience for what was judged to be proper public broadcasting then no audience was preferred"<sup>40</sup>.

This attitude stems, in large part, from the faulty conflation of consumer capitalist interests with those of the audience. According to this logic, it was perfectly understandable, though nevertheless deplorable, that private broadcasters would cater first and foremost to the aspirations of the audience as defined by their program ratings. After all, this practice was easily rationalized as simply a case of one set of private interests catering to another set of private interests; of private broadcasters capitalizing on the private pleasures of Canadians as individual consumers in a market-based economy. However, for the public broadcaster to openly compete with private broadcasters in their pursuit of the audience was to succumb to Canadian consumers' seemingly insatiable desire for American entertainment programming rather than to incite them to embrace their role as citizens dedicated to the promotion and protection of national goals and goods. As a result, not only in Canada but in many other countries around the world where public broadcasting played a predominant role, "the audience could not get what it wanted; instead it had to learn to love what it got"<sup>41</sup>.

The obvious fallacy of such logic is that having a voice in determining public broadcasting programming options meant checking one's identity and interests at the door. Being a member of the audience, that is to say, assessing

competing claims for one's attention, thus became a necessary recourse for expressing one's individual interests and identity with regards to broadcast programming. As Breda Luthar explains in "Identity Management and Popular Representational Form", the positions one assumes as a member of the audience help to define and express one's identity. Luthar, drawing on observations by Lasch, notes that this process:

...has two constituent parts: first, the group we define ourselves with (in-group) and the group the identity keeps a distance from (out-group); and second classification. Identity according to this analysis, is in part defined by classification and typification schemes. We constantly classify all objects of material and cultural consumption, for example TV programmes, and at the same time read and evaluate them"<sup>42</sup>.

Although this process continues irrespective of national public broadcasters' attempts to constrain programming to that which conforms to a constricted public's definition of the national interest and identity, interaction with public broadcasting, insofar as it contributes to identity formation processes, is severely restricted by this conflation.

It is not surprising then, as Preben Sepstrup explains, that, unable to have their interests and needs heard in the realm of public broadcasting, those who have not traditionally shared the dominant vision have sought an escape in transnational consumption. As Sepstrup notes with regard to Denmark's public broadcasting, an observation that is equally pertinent in the Canadian context:

...a large share of the programming is not seen as relevant by a majority of the audience; these programs do not deal with subjects *they* find interesting and do not relate to *their* point of view, *their* experiences, *their* way of understanding or *their* language. These programs are not really propagating *their* culture or expressing true diversity or versatility. Seen from this point of view, the social groups that are most readily attracted to transnational, commercial television are the same groups that have been let down the most by the old public service broadcasters...<sup>43</sup>

Unable to recognize their particularities as citizens and consumers in the public (read nationalist) definition of public broadcast programming, these individuals and groups have sought to express their unrecuperated positivity in acts of consumption which, at a superficial level, exclude only those who forego the desire to consume.

Given that this transnational consumption is threatening to both the political relevance and the financial stability of national public broadcasters, this consumption has often been framed as a trend that must be countered or at least, contained. However, as Peter Dahlgren argues in Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age, such consumption may be crucial in creating and sustaining discursive communities which challenge, and potentially transcend, the limited discursive arenas traditionally provided by national public broadcasters:

Today we witness how satellite television may be generating international communities. If audience segmentation within nations is contributing to differentiated interpretive communities, the internationalization of TV news production is perhaps helping to construct inchoate international networks of shared meaning. While such constellations have no formal political base, they may well be of significance for international opinion formation<sup>44</sup>.

Therefore, insofar as deliberations both about and within public broadcasting reproduce the deep contradictions between self-abstraction and self-realization implicit in the bourgeois public sphere, public broadcasting is "...not corrupted by its articulation with consumption - if anything consumption sustains a counter-publicity that cuts across [its] self-contradictions"<sup>45</sup>. As Thomas explains, in its consumption activities, "The Audience tends to create its own balance, and so far as it can the Market follows"<sup>46</sup>.

Such a statement would seem to suggest that national public broadcasters should follow the market's example and attempt to acquiesce to the perceived needs of the audience at the expense of the public. To the contrary, Thomas argues that the CBC should "open the way for experiment and variety"<sup>47</sup> and encourage by its example, "...the organized and responsible development of relationships directly between listener and broadcaster"<sup>48</sup>. In opening the way for experiment and variety, public broadcasters would counteract the conservative tendencies of the market; tendencies which lead to media concentration, product homogenization, and subjugation of creativity to the coercive power of advertisers. The public broadcaster would also counteract the conservative viewing tendencies of the audience, encouraging audience members to move beyond the comfortable and the familiar to more widely and critically evaluate the competing claims for their attention.

At the same time, however, public broadcasting should not be dictated by a falsely perceived need to subsume the interests of the audience and the

predilections of the market to public concerns. It is not by ignoring the needs and interests of Canadian citizens as expressed in their consumption choices as members of the audience that the CBC will make them into a channel for the national good. Arguably, it is in attempting to respond to, and expand the interests of the audience by providing a palatable alternative to the market (rather than by denying or ignoring the audience's interests as called for by the public), that the CBC would contribute more meaningfully to a truly public definition of the common good.

However, for public broadcasters such as the CBC to contribute more meaningfully to the linkage of private identities and interests to socially useful action they will have to move beyond traditional assumptions about the public and the audience which reinforce and reproduce the abstraction between individuals' privately lived experience and their publicly shared goals and goods. In particular, public broadcasters will have to eschew images of audiences as being incapable of determining for themselves the types of public broadcasting administration and programming that will best serve Canadians' interests as citizens and consumers. As Michel Souchon argues in "Qu'attend le public de la télévision et du service public?", to say that any attempt by public broadcasters to respond to the needs and interests of their audiences:

...est synonyme de la renonciation à la qualité, de nivellement par le bas, c'est porter sur les téléspectateurs un jugement méprisant en les prétendant incapables de choisir la qualité lorsqu'ils sont placés devant deux émissions également attrayantes et intéressantes<sup>49</sup>.

Arguably, such a judgement has been allowed to persist in the Canadian context because it has served to justify the continued intervention of the public in Canadian public broadcasting decision-making.

For those preoccupied with the public interest to admit that the audience might be anything but a mass to be educated or a caldron of irrational individual interests to be contained would have been to surrender nationalists' right to determine, on behalf of all Canadians, how this public resource should be deployed. Consequently, the only solution was to consistently thwart audiences' attempts to determine for themselves which competing claims for their attention merited further consideration or support. It is thus the conflation of consumer capitalist interests - private concerns and interests ruled out of order *a priori* - with those of the audience which has sustained and fuelled the continued conflation of nationalist and public interests.

These conflations have propagated a regime which, with the help of government, legislative bodies and critical institutions, has consistently "paedocratized" the audience. As John Hartley argues in "Tele-ology: Studies in Television", this process involves:

... setting it [the audience] up as an 'other' which is in need of protection from its own innocence, vulnerability and unbridled urges...Television networks, government regulators and critical institutions all construct TV as a paedocratic regime, but as often as not they only do this as a prelude to some form of coup in which they try to snatch power away from the wild, undomesticated and irresponsible audience they've imagined in order to govern it (for its own good, of course)<sup>50</sup>.



In this sense then, the definition of the audience and the delimitation of its role in the determination and administration of broadcast programming has consistently reflected not the needs and aspirations of Canadians as citizens and consumers, but the needs and aspirations of the institutions and groups who have sought to train audiences to their own purposes. As Ien Ang explains: "...the audience is inevitably viewed either from 'above' or from 'outside': from an institutional point of view which sees 'television audience' as an objectified category of others to be controlled"<sup>51</sup>. The end result of the objectification is that audience members "...are not seen as individual persons or social subjects with their own particularities, but are given the status of serialized parts of an objectified whole (market or public)"<sup>52</sup>.

In the Canadian context, this simultaneous "paedocratization" of Canadian audiences and pedagogic instruction in national goals and goods by means of public broadcasting has had a deleterious effect. Canadian audiences have so rarely been given the opportunity to publicly express their ideas and opinions of public broadcasting in a forum that will lead to substantive change, that despite all institutional claims to be responding to the concerns and interests of the audience, audiences are essentially absent from administration and programming decision-making. As John Hartley explains, not only in Canada, but around the world, audiences are:

...so rarely self-represented that they are almost always absent, making TV audiences perhaps the largest 'community' in the world that is subject to what Edward Said has dubbed the discourse of 'orientalism', whereby

disorganized communities which have never developed or won adequate means of self-representation, and which exist almost wholly within the imagination or the rhetoric of those who speak on their behalf, become the 'other' of powerful, imperial discourses<sup>53</sup>.

The audience is in part constituted as "other" because unlike broadcasters who have a defined location, if only in the broadcast production centre, the audience occupies no tangible space. This ephemeral quality of the audience, coupled with the fact that audience members' experiences are essentially privatized in the domesticity of the home, make it difficult for the audience as an entity to exteriorize and represent itself.

Most fundamentally, however, the lack of self-representation from which individuals as members of the audience suffer rests on a powerful and pervasive paradox: the simultaneous discursive construction of audience members as both separate and identical. As Janine Marchessault explains in "Reflections on the dispossessed: Video and the Challenge for Change experiment":

This construction creates a common otherness, the 'people', whose solidarity is made impossible under the burden of difference. Here, 'the people' or 'the community' [or the 'audience'] are defined negatively by exclusion, by the participation, wealth and access to power that they do not have...The 'strategic value' of these terms is found in the way they maintain dominant perceptions of how cultural space is organized and valued<sup>54</sup>.

The purpose of suggesting that audiences need to be self-represented is thus to demonstrate the normative basis of these power relations and to open up the terrain in which individuals are invited to position themselves discursively as

members of the audience.

A useful starting point for this redefinition is Michel de Certeau's distinction between the strategies of the powerful and the tactics of the weak. As De Certeau notes, unlike the strategies of the powerful which are based on a wilful subject's ability to delimit and speak from a place of one's own:

...a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy ...Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection<sup>55</sup>.

Such is the fate of the audience, particularly in the Canadian context where the disempowering effect of the audience's lack of self-representation is exacerbated by Canadian citizens equally problematic representation as members of the public.

Both of these discursive entities, while supposedly constituted by, and indicative of, Canadians' identities and interests as citizens and consumers, provide little or no voice for Canadians' self-determination of the role and the realm of Canadian public broadcasting. This, despite the fact that, as Ross Eaman writes, "...public broadcasting should not exist merely to ensure that programming serves the public interest. Its aim should also be to enable the public itself to determine wherein its interests lies"<sup>56</sup>. Yet in order for Canadians, as consumers and citizens, and as members of the audience and of the public, to determine where their interests lie, nationalists' cooption of the

public can no longer be allowed to silence the voice of the audience. Likewise, Canadians can no longer be forced to subsume *a priori* their interests and needs as consumers to their interests and needs as citizens. To suggest, as does Trine Syversten, that "it is perfectly legitimate to argue politically and culturally that certain perspectives, programme categories, modes of address, types of content etc. should be more prominent in the television output, whereas privately we may prefer not to watch these types of programmes"<sup>57</sup> is only to further promote self-deception and self-denial.

Rather, we need to recognize that in the continuous process of defining and enacting their personal and collective interests, Canadians' roles and aspirations as members of the public and the audience and as citizens and as consumers, are essential countersecting forces. The temptation to artificially dissolve the audience which is constituted as "other" in public broadcasting decision-making, by arbitrarily excluding self-interest from the debate, must therefore be resisted. Instead, the powerful and strategic role that the audience constituted as "other" can play in the administration and programming of public broadcasting must be recognized and reinforced. As Bruce Robbins explains, "...the other produces incongruity within any field [in this case, within public broadcasting] which keeps the public from being entirely and complacently itself"<sup>58</sup>. As a result, in the process of participating in public broadcasting decision-making and programming, the audience's task "...becomes primarily one of public-making, making public or visible, opening to a variety of

perspectives and judgements, but also the interdisciplinary fashioning of new publics, new instances of judgements, new collective viewpoints"<sup>59</sup>.

Ironically then, it is in assuming a position as a member of the audience - a role that Canadians have too often been asked to subsume to their responsibilities as members of the public - that Canadians can create and recreate themselves as social "others" thereby defining and redefining their place amongst the public. When the audience's role is viewed in this way, the public can then be reconceptualized as "a process within the framework of a community"<sup>60</sup>. As Peter Dahlgren notes:

If publics emerge in the discursive interaction of citizens, then audiences (that is to say the position of being an audience member) should be realistically seen as a moment, a step in the process of being a member of the public. It constitutes the encounter with media output within the immediate social ecology of reading/viewing/listening. The 'publicness' can be said to emerge in the social practices which emanate beyond that interface<sup>61</sup>.

The individual as audience member and citizen thus meets when one's actions and opinions as a member of the audience sustain and create opportunities for action and opinion-formation as a citizen. This transforms the viewing experience from a privatizing, narrowly conceived self-interested activity into a crucial component of the democratic process.

Unlike the conflation of nationalist and public interest and consumer capitalist and audience interests, this conception of the audience and the public is rooted in a continuous and self-reflexive process. The definitions and images of the public that Canadians' involvement as members of the audience creates

and sustains are retransmitted via the media to be repeatedly challenged and modified through both their audience and civic participation. As John Hartley notes in The Politics of Pictures, this "participation takes the form, among others, of confession, on screen and page, constant private soul-searching, comparison, internal interrogation and realignment of the self"<sup>62</sup>. The self-representation of the audience and the public emerges from Canadians' ability to speak freely and independently from their discursive positions as both audience members and citizens.

When the public and the audience are understood from this perspective, as countersecting forces which play a significant role in creating and sustaining the other in tandem, then the perceived need to subsume the needs and interests of the audience to those of the public no longer has any credence. Insofar as the audience has always been the repository for private interests and identities, this therefore means no longer excluding these private concerns from public discussion both about and within public broadcasting administration and programming. The decision to allow the audience with all its self-interests intact to participate in the decision-making and programming process, can never guarantee national consensus or national unity in the way that the conflation of nationalists' interests with those of the public purported to do. Arguably, however, the full and varied participation of the audience and the public in Canadian public broadcasting will ensure that individuals as citizens and consumers are given repeated opportunities to link their interests and identities,

opportunities that the traditional understanding of the role of the public and the audience could never provide.

In questioning the traditional concept, role and power of the audience and the public respectively, this analysis does not seek to provide a more accurate representation of the "true" audience or public. Clearly, the audience and the public remain discursive entities which can be understood from a variety of perspectives and wielded for a variety of purposes. As Martin Allor argues in relation to the audience, an observation that is equally true in regards to the public:

...the audience exists nowhere; it inhabits no real space, only positions within analytic discourses. The institutions, individuals and practices that provoke the questions of subject as social are only open to our gaze through the lenses of particular problematics<sup>63</sup>.

If we accept this premise, then the crucial question to be answered is not: How can the CBC achieve a more accurate or complete understanding of the real/empirical Canadian audience and public in order to better serve its needs and interests?. Rather, the question we must answer is: How can the CBC encourage citizens - both as members of the audience and of the public - to take up the discursive positions which will lead to the development of the communicative ethics required both to realize the ideal of democratic communication and to revitalize the public sphere?

At first glance, to even ask such a question would seem to suggest that I have attempted to liberate Canadian citizens, as members of the audience and

the public, from the nationalists' cooption of public broadcasting, only to paedocratize them again to achieve other pedagogic ends. One can rightly ask why Canadian citizens should not simply be left to their own devices in determining what for them are the best positions to take up in order to participate meaningfully both in public broadcasting and the public sphere. The answer to this question is provided in part by Thomas McCarthy who contends that:

...participants' interpretation of their needs cannot simply be taken at face value. Though they have a privileged access to their own feelings and desires, they are by no means the sole or final arbiters regarding them... motives and ends have something intersubjective about them, they are always interpreted in the light of a cultural tradition...[thus] the individual actor cannot be the final instance in developing and revising his interpretation of needs<sup>64</sup>.

Since it is predominantly in and through dialogue that Canadians come to identify and act upon their individual and group interests and identities, it is not only legitimate, but essential to ask how public broadcasters such as the CBC, as dialogical partners and mediators of social reality, can contribute more meaningfully to this process.

#### Creating a conducive environment for communicative ethics

As I have demonstrated, public broadcasters' contribution to the process of defining and revising individual and collective interests and identities fundamentally depends on their ability to refrain from positing national goals and goods in advance. However, to arrive at this conclusion is not to suggest



that no guidelines should underlie public broadcasting's administrative and programming decisions. As I illustrated, such a move only serves to reinforce and naturalize dominant interests to such an extent that they are contested with difficulty. Rather than commit to the disempowering logic of abstraction, I therefore suggest that these decisions be guided by the need to promote the communicative ethics required to realize the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public broadcasting itself. The communicative ethics I propose is premised on the respect and integration of four principles: pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability. These principles which I argue should fuel public broadcasting decision-making are not skills to be honed in order to transform Canadians into more rational and effective debaters, but rather ethical principles which will increase the complex levels of freedom and equality of all public sphere participants.

The first two principles, pluralism and intrinsic analysis, are fundamentally rooted in the belief that "all cultures possess intrinsic value and in this sense are of equal value"<sup>65</sup>. Such a perspective does not assume that all aspects of all individuals' or groups' beliefs, viewpoints and practices are equally worthy of being espoused as common goals and goods. However, this perspective is premised on the belief that all individuals and groups have the *potential* to contribute meaningfully to the definition of these goals and goods. As a result, no subject or voice should be ruled out of order *a priori* or permanently. This ethical emphasis on pluralism and intrinsic analysis directly

confronts public broadcasters' traditional attempts to limit representation to that which conforms to the national consensus. As Stig Hjarvard explains, most public broadcasters have failed thus far to acknowledge or address the concerns of those who contest nationalist interests:

In the past, public service broadcasting tried to achieve representation without pluralism. Opinions and information were selected according to whether or not they conformed to the consensus of the dominant national political culture. As a result, public service broadcasting neglected the political, social and aesthetic experience of different social groupings and classes. A revitalization of the public service concept must take pluralism as its starting point<sup>66</sup>.

It is important to note, however, that in attempting to depict social reality from as many different angles and perspectives as possible, public broadcasters would not simply privilege pluralism for pluralism's sake.

Rather, public broadcasters would be encouraged to highlight the types and levels of pluralism that are likely to enhance the freedom and equality of those who interact with their programming. What types and levels of pluralism would this entail? One way in which public broadcasters could heighten freedom and equality through diversity would be to increase the interconnections amongst programming emanating from local, regional, national and international production sites. Public broadcasters could also seek to establish links between experiences and ideas which are completely or relatively unknown to their audiences and those that are more familiar and recognizable. Such a move would enable audiences to consider familiar images, arguments, discourses, models and theories in a new light; one which incites them to

reconsider long held beliefs or assumptions about themselves and the world in which they live. As Jay Blumler and Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem suggest in "New Roles for Public Service Television", in presenting reality from as many different spacial, temporal and intellectual loci and voices as possible, public broadcasting could:

...distinguish itself by offering a variety of ways of depicting social reality - that is to reflect it, to comprehend it, to deplore and attack it, to enjoy it, or to redesign the concept of it. By making such variety available discoveries are possible and curiosity has a field of activity. Only in such a manner can current viewpoints and preferences be refreshed and developed from a potentially wealthy supply instead of standing stagnant<sup>67</sup>.

The pluralistic basis of public broadcasting would thus extend not only to a diversity of subject matters and voices, but also to a diversity of analytic approaches and purposes.

The emphasis on diverse approaches and purposes would enable public broadcasters to present the incongruities and contradictions amongst the various perspectives without succumbing to a falsely perceived need to rationalize away or smooth over these differences simply for the sake of concluding that some consensus could be reached when in fact the individuals and groups concerned remain deeply divided. Similarly, this emphasis would counteract the tendency to overemphasize conflict or division amongst various groups by presenting caricatures of their positions and concerns or by attempting to reduce all debates to binary oppositions. To the contrary, public broadcasters would contribute to diversity by dispensing with the traditional

pro-con model of public debate normally used to defend journalistic balance and objectivity. Instead, they would seek to "transcend the interest that competing parties have in depicting themselves in certain ways...enabling the questions at issue to be substantively sifted"<sup>68</sup>. This shift away from imposed consensus and binary oppositions would free both those who speak and those who watch and listen from the cacophony of competing monologues that currently characterizes much of national public broadcasting.

Most importantly, however, in adopting diverse depictions of social reality as an ethical guideline, public broadcasters would be encouraged to grasp the people, places and perspectives it addresses from within. The cultural, political, economic and social practices and beliefs of people who are both familiar and foreign to audiences would thus be brought to light and into focus through the lens of intrinsic analysis. As Clifford Geertz argues, regardless of which approach one uses to compare and contrast diverse issues or perspectives, intrinsic analysis should be a guiding ethical principle:

...one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay...within a single, more or less bounded form, and circle steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or informing contrast. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operated, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same, societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them<sup>69</sup>.

In providing access to interpretations and lives that fundamentally differ from those of their audiences, public broadcasters' emphasis on intrinsic analysis

would not necessarily lead to widespread acceptance of, or support for, these practices and beliefs. However, public broadcasters' decision to make intrinsic analysis a guiding principle would increase the likelihood that these perspectives would be more comprehensively explored, and hopefully, better understood.

Intrinsic analysis is invaluable because it provides a point of entry for audiences to explore seemingly strange and incomprehensible beliefs, practices and opinions which they may have had a tendency to dismiss gratuitously, and consequently, leave unexamined. Hence, in making intrinsic analysis a guiding ethical principle, public broadcasters would provide further opportunities for audiences to consider or reconsider viewpoints, issues and lifestyles from within the perspective of those who espouse them. In the words of John Keane, such opportunities enable individuals as audience members and citizens to "sense the abnormality of normalcy and make them capable of appreciating and tolerating a multitude of norms, of acting other than normally"<sup>70</sup>.

Crucially, intrinsic analysis not only facilitates the process of discovering why these ideas and ideals were/are important to their adherents but also enables audiences to determine what elements of these interpretations of reality are pertinent to, or resonate forcefully with, their individual definitions of personal and public issues. As Richard Schweder reminds us in Thinking Through Cultures:

...the conceptions held by others are available to us, in the sense that when we truly understand their conception of things we come to recognize possibilities latent within our own rationality, or existent in the history of our own reason, and those ways of conceiving of things become salient for us for the first time, or once again<sup>71</sup>.

As a result, access to different interpretations of reality does not simply familiarize audiences with these perspectives so as to reinforce their comfort level with regards to their own practices and beliefs. Rather, public broadcasters' effort to provide audiences with access to a variety of different practices of depicting and experiencing social reality is intended to encourage audiences to open their minds and hearts to a multitude of different ways of comprehending, experiencing and organizing communal life.

Yet rather than attempt to get audiences on side by predetermining that pluralism and intrinsic analysis are commonly shared goals and then naturalizing them into the broadcasting landscape, public broadcasters' response to this dilemma should be to emphasize a third and fourth ethical principle, participatory democracy and mutual accountability. In fact, adopting participatory democracy and mutual accountability as ethical guidelines may well be the linchpin required to truly revitalize the discursive exchanges that take place within public broadcasting, and by extension, the public sphere. Broadly speaking, public broadcasters' ability to promote participatory democracy and mutual accountability in and through their programming would likely enable citizens to re-envision both the purposes and the contexts within which these discursive exchanges occur. As William Gilsdorf suggests, as citizens, we would all benefit from public broadcasting that leads "...us to make different sense of our political process and see the openings for our participation in it, as well as the contradictions in it - in ways that would lead

to a healthy critique instead of a cynicism that breeds apathy"<sup>72</sup>.

Arguably, these openings for participation and this critique which leads to substantial change would become more transparent and more accessible in discursive arenas that promote participatory democracy and mutual accountability. The reasons for this are twofold. First, in adopting participatory democracy as an ethical principle, public broadcasters would enshrine their audiences' right and responsibility to have a say in determining both the content and the framework of this integrative arena of discursive interaction. As Dianne Ruscinski explains in "The Centrality of Reciprocity to Communication and Democracy":

...participatory democratic theory conceptualizes democracy as the *process* of interactive decision-making. This focus makes communication an essential component of participatory democracy theory. Democratic decision-making requires that goals and aims of common activities be recognized and understood by the interactants. Yet these goals and aims are often disputed and are constantly being renegotiated. Thus, participatory democracy is conceptualized as a set of continuous communicative processes that takes its concrete form in political discussion and debate<sup>73</sup>.

Participatory democracy would thus reinforce individuals' freedom and equality of intervention and interaction in decision-making processes both within and about public broadcasting. Public broadcasters' recourse to participatory democracy would also allow them to openly acknowledge and respond to the continuous, self-reflexive and unpredictable nature of the dialogical exchanges they mediate.

Second, in adopting mutual accountability as an ethical guideline, public broadcasters would displace Habermas' emphasis on the rational character of public exchanges, in favour of an emphasis on the reasonable quality of these debates. As Paddy Scannell explains:

I prefer to characterize the impact of broadcasting as enhancing the reasonable as distinct from the rational, character of daily life in public and private contexts. In this context, reasonable has the force of mutually accountable behaviour, that is, if called upon, individuals can offer reasons and accounts for what they have said or done. To refuse an explanation, if called for, is unreasonable. Reasonableness is a guarantee and hallmark of forms of private and public life in which people accept mutual obligations to each other - in short, deal with each other as equals<sup>74</sup>.

As Scannell notes, this process would be facilitated above all by the fact that when participatory democracy and mutual accountability become guiding principles "the right to ask for explanations and accounts (where necessary or relevant) is a communicative entitlement"<sup>75</sup>.

Emphasis on the reasonable and participatory character of these discursive exchanges would thus encourage, as Dianne Ruscinski suggests, "negotiation as to whether or not political or social issues are or should be amenable to political solutions"<sup>76</sup> in the first place. While it may be perfectly rational to contend that there must be or should be a political solution to each of the issues raised in the public sphere, it may in fact be much more reasonable and ultimately more just to consider and eventually follow an alternate course of action. Among the alternatives might be the recognition



that a particular issue is best dealt with by each person in his/her own way rather than by means of majority rule or rational consensus. As Richard Bernstein reminds us: "...it is the very appeal to something like the idea of a rational consensus that has always been used to block, stifle or rule out revolutionary turns in the conversation"<sup>77</sup>.

Encouraging participatory democracy and mutually accountable behaviour might also increase the facility with which public sphere deliberants might recognize and act upon what John Keane has described as "the flexibility and reversibility or biodegradability of decision-making"<sup>78</sup>. Given that there are always new codes to be compared, sifted and rediscovered, new ways of imagining and reorganizing social reality through discursive exchange become not only feasible, but essential for deliberants' continued adaptation to their changing environment. Nowhere is this need for the timely recognition of the biodegradability of decision-making more acute than with regards to the evaluation of the probabilities and consequences of late twentieth century risks. Ironically, however, it is only in taking new risks both in regards to the production and administration of their programming that public broadcasters might be able to heighten people's trust thereby increasing their desire to participate and be mutually accountable in the process of defining and determining risk communication.

### Conclusion

Clearly, public broadcasters' espousal of these principles can never guarantee consensus on national goals and goods in the manner that Canadian nationalists' conflation of their interests with those of the public purported to do. Likewise, espousal of these principles as the basis for public broadcasting programming and decision-making cannot ensure that private interests will not attempt to coopt public broadcasting or to subvert it to their exclusive needs. Nevertheless, these four principles, pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability, remain a good starting point in that they encourage individuals as audience members and citizens to view cultural institutions such as national public broadcasting not as tools to craft an imposed consensus and artificial sense of unity, but rather as a venue for:

...voices each the expression of a distinct condition and understanding of the world and a distinct idiom of human self-understanding, and of the culture itself as these voices joined, as such voices could only be joined, in a conversation - an endless unrehearsed intellectual adventure in which, in imagination, we enter into a variety of modes of understanding the world and ourselves and are not disconcerted by the differences or dismayed by the inconclusiveness of it all. This openness to diverse voices helps to keep alive both our distinctiveness and the possibility of commonalities<sup>79</sup>.

When public broadcasting is understood in this way, as a forum for an endless, unrehearsed conversation amongst all those who wish to participate, then the ideal of democratic communication can be realized. Such a forum can promote both the freedom required to acknowledge and embrace human differences and

the equality required to ensure the respect of shared human expectations and human rights.

However, even pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability cannot be posited as definitive, unquestionable, cornerstones of public broadcasting. As Lawrence Daressa explains, a "public" public television must:

...invite the discontinuities, the ruptures, which provide the space in which democratic debate and personal growth can occur, the fissures in the status quo which show that we can invent a future different from the past. [Such a television must]...position the viewer in the centre of a matrix of arguments about how to construct social reality<sup>80</sup>.

These discontinuities and ruptures cannot be limited to the content of public broadcasting programming, they must also be extended to its administrative decisions and goals. As a result, these four principles cannot be posited as fundamental tenets in advance, but rather must be subject to continuous reevaluation and potential modification as all those who are involved in the deliberation processes both about and within public broadcasting see fit. Despite this caveat, these four principles are a good springboard for the discussion of the goals and goods which must drive public broadcasting because they have the potential to enhance all participants' levels of freedom and equality. An openness to pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability, might well transform public broadcasting into an arena of discursive interaction which promotes the trust, autonomy and

accountability required for citizens to participate more fully in a democratic public sphere.

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## REASSESSING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

The acceptance and respect of the principles of mutual accountability and participatory democracy discussed in the previous chapter do not develop by osmosis. They depend upon both a public broadcaster and a citizenry that are committed to these principles with regards not only to programming decision-making, but to the administration of public broadcasting as a whole. Arguably, however, the widespread recognition and endorsement of mutual accountability and participatory democracy have been severely hampered by public broadcasters' adamant insistence on maintaining an arm's length stance from the State. Unfortunately, this effort to protect public broadcasting from unwarranted interference by governments or politicians of the day has had a deleterious residual effect on public broadcasters' relationships with the citizenry they purport to serve. In many countries with strong public broadcasting traditions, this philosophical insistence on maintaining a strict separation between public broadcasting and the State has translated into a practical reality of preventing the involvement of all but a chosen few citizens in public broadcasting decision-making. The same faulty logic which led Habermas to insist on a sharp separation between civil society and the State - thereby reinforcing the non-involvement of the majority of citizens in the bourgeois public sphere - is thus also responsible for the virtual absence of

autonomous citizens in public broadcasting decision-making in the contemporary public sphere.

As explained in chapter 2, Habermas' insistence on the need to maintain a sharp separation between civil society and the State was based on his conclusion that this was the only way to ensure the autonomy of public opinion and to safeguard the possibility of a critical evaluation of government. In Habermas' estimation, the intermingling of civil society and the State all but destroyed the possibility of generating non-coercive and truly public, critical publicity. However, as was argued in the consideration of this third problematic assumption underlying Habermas' conception of the public sphere, his conclusion cannot be sustained for two crucial reasons. First, the critical publicity which Habermas feared would be supplanted by manipulative publicity in a society characterized by the mutual absorption of civil society and the State, was already coercive and nonpublic in nature. Consequently, to insist on the separation of civil society and the State in which this nonpublic publicity was rooted, was to unwittingly sustain and reinforce the manipulative publicity of the bourgeois public sphere. Second, contrary to Habermas' assumption, the critical publicity of the bourgeois public sphere was neither autonomous, nor effective in its critique of government insofar as its deliberations were relegated to a distributive public sphere. It was thus argued that civil society's critical discursive check on the State is only meaningful if it is fortified by direct and repeated opportunities to participate in, and significantly influence, market

and state decision-making processes.

Civil society's recognition of the emancipatory potential latent in its decision-making rights and responsibilities is particularly crucial in light of the current redefinition of the respective roles of the media, the market and the state. The transgression and potential disintegration of the nation-state at the hands of international expansion and globalization of free market ideology has contributed to a critical void in institutional authority, and consequently, a profound crisis of representation. For public broadcasters, whose societal relevance and institutional authority has always been legislated and sanctioned at least in part by the state, the problem of representation becomes acute. As Stig Hjarvard notes, the reverberating question is: "For whom, in what social space and for what purpose should the public service broadcasters provide symbolic representation?"<sup>1</sup>.

It cannot be denied that the endemic contradictions of both market and state systems pose major representational challenges within the public sphere. Nevertheless, the segmentation of audiences, the birth of new political and social movements, the increasing legitimacy accorded to identity politics and consumers' heightened access to advanced computer and communication technology to which these contradictions give rise, may well function to pull the public sphere and its major arenas of discursive interaction into new, and otherwise uncharted directions. As Dahlgren suggests, the radical redefinition of the market, the media and the state and the new configurations created by

their transformation provides the contours for "...historically new conditions for the public sphere, a new nexus to set in contrast to the dominant one of the corporate state and its major media"<sup>2</sup>.

For both citizens and public broadcasters who are struggling to redefine their roles and responsibilities in light of the new possibilities and demands created by the reconfiguration of the relationships among the market, the media and the state, answers to the following questions are of the utmost urgency.

First, how have public broadcasters' battle cries of corporate independence, media professionalism and journalistic integrity reinforced the rift between public broadcasters and their respective citizenry? Second, despite the difficulty and risks associated with democratic initiatives, can public broadcasters foster mutual accountability through citizens' involvement in decision-making processes without completely undermining their real or proclaimed "arm's length stance from the State"? Third, what are the fallacies inherent in prevailing strategies to democratize the media and/or use the media as a tool for the democratization of society? Moreover, how does the redefinition of public broadcasting insert itself into the redefinition of representative democracy as a whole? And finally, what new mechanisms of intra-public coordination and which forms of mutual accountability need to be envisaged to develop both citizens' trust and autonomy in public broadcasting decision-making?

To begin, I will briefly consider how notions of journalistic integrity, media professionalism and corporate autonomy have created and sustained a barrier to more meaningful public participation in the administration and programming of public broadcasting. Once the main reasons for this barrier have been established, I will recapitulate the arguments which lead to the recognition of the need to share decision-making responsibilities with citizens, especially as these arguments apply to public broadcasting. In particular, the definition of freedom that this stance entails will be reiterated. At the same time, however, I will acknowledge the equally important need to avoid subsuming public broadcasters' interests and activities to those of the State. In attempting to walk this tightrope of promoting full public participation while maintaining a fundamental degree of independence from state intervention, I will reiterate why neither the State nor the market can independently assume decision-making responsibilities for broadcasting.

My portrayal of the market and the State as counter-cutting forces whose tensions need to be heightened will lead me to posit both public broadcasters and societies whose main tenet is participation as the answer to the current impasse. Significantly, the type of democratic participation I envisage is neither subject to the tyranny of direct democracy nor limited to the unimaginative and ultimately defeatist preoccupation with balance which characterizes much of traditional representative democracy. As I will argue, both direct democracy and traditional representational democracy, while

purporting to provide access to, and involvement for, the greatest number of citizens possible, actually contract the sphere of public debate and decision-making. The democratic methods and mechanisms proposed by these forms of political representation limit the majority of citizens' autonomy and lessen their sense of accountability for collectively endorsed decisions. Since trust stands in tandem with accountability, this too is undermined.

In contrast with these models, the participatory democracy I envisage involves new forms of self-management and intra-public coordination which recognize the dynamic yet decisive combination of autonomy, trust and mutual accountability required to achieve the ideal of democratic communication. This proposed relationship between public broadcasters and citizens will not necessarily lead to full-fledged support for all or even most of public broadcasters' initiatives. In fact, it is likely to have the opposite effect. It will repeatedly subject public broadcasters not only to citizen mediation in decision-making processes but also to the need to redefine and reinvent both their programming and their relationships with their audiences. Significantly, however, this participatory, democratic relationship which I suggest public broadcasters should seek to cultivate both with and amongst the citizens they serve also acknowledges that there are many facets to decision-making, not all of which require participants to be the final authors of decisions in order to be effective and influential partners in the process.

### Scaling the palisade to public participation

Before I describe the key characteristics which I believe should mark public broadcasters' new relationship with the citizens they are mandated to serve, let us briefly consider why public broadcasters, in the name of corporate autonomy, objectivity and professionalism, have repeatedly reinforced the rift between themselves and their publics. If one were to ask those involved in public broadcasting administration or programming why the majority of citizens are limited to opinion-forming roles as opposed to decision-making responsibilities insofar as public broadcasting is concerned, they would likely state one, or all three, of the following reasons. First, they might argue that wide-scale public participation in decision-making processes would further expose public broadcasting to manipulation and/or cooption by a steady stream of private and political interest groups who already attempt to use the media to their advantage. Decision-making processes would deteriorate into a tug of war with the final arbitrator being the individuals or groups who exercised the greatest political muscle. Public broadcasting would become impotent in its power to manage and program a public resource. Such a move would essentially privatize the public airwaves.

One can easily envisage how this scenario might be a potential outcome or implication of new forms of public participation. Nevertheless, this first reason for not seeking greater public involvement in public broadcasting decision-making falls prey to the assumption refuted in the previous chapter,



namely that those appointed as knowledge-brokers can transcend their own private interests and assumptions to determine matters of common concern or good for all. To take the Canadian case as but one example, it is not at all certain that the CBC board of directors, constituted primarily of political appointees, is better able to determine the future of public broadcasting than any other of the country's citizens. As Wayne Skene observes in Fade to Black: A Requiem for the CBC, those who sit on the CBC's Board have little personal contact with the majority of Canadian citizens. As a result, they have limited knowledge of the diverse needs and expectations of these citizens with regards to public broadcasting:

Many years ago, they [the Board] used to hold their meetings in public, entertaining submissions and comments from the general public. Now they meet with 'the public' (usually composed of such common folk as premiers, business and cultural leaders and assorted CBC employees and ex-employees) most often by invitation only...Do they really know what the elementary teacher next door feels about the CBC, or the fisherman at the wharf, the mechanic in the garage, the trucker out of Estevan? When was the last time a Board member solicited your input into decision-making concerning the CBC?<sup>3</sup>

Notably, the same argument could apply to CBC administrators and creative personnel whose talent and commitment to public broadcasting may be indisputable, but whose neutrality, especially when their own ideas or jobs are on the line, could easily be questioned.

What public broadcasters fail to realize is that it is not only impossible, but undesirable to attempt to outlaw *a priori* private interests from public

debates. To do so is simply to reinforce the privileged position of the systems' knowledge-brokers. Moreover, by internalizing this assumption, public broadcasters fail to acknowledge that the practical recognition of citizens' right to participate in this decision-making process will not necessarily undermine public broadcasters' power to act decisively. In fact, to the contrary, it could provide both the impetus and the legitimation that public broadcasters require to make substantive, positive changes to their organizations and programming. As Stuart Adam reminds us: "Not only can rights be exercised as trumps to prevent something from happening, they can also be exercised in a pro-active or a positive way to compel someone to do something"<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, the same analogy could be made with regards to self-interest.

However, even if public broadcasters could be convinced that it is in both their best interest and that of the citizens to whom they are accountable to encourage greater public participation in decision-making, they would likely have a second reason to dispute the feasibility of this proposal. Public broadcasters are liable to argue that although it would be worthwhile to involve a broader cross-section of citizens in decision-making processes, the quality of the programming, the efficiency of the administration and even the solvency of the operation would all be jeopardized by such an arrangement. In other words, public broadcasters would argue that the so-called ordinary citizen has neither the expertise nor the time to contribute meaningfully and systematically to the decision-making process.

In the Canadian case, such an attitude stems in large part from the national public broadcaster's increasing tendency to espouse commercial imperatives at the expense of its public service mandate. As Skene notes, many English television network administrators:

...believe that the commercial value of a program is more important than its social function. They talk about the criterion being 'good television' - a commodity presumably, only they in Toronto are capable of delivering. They do not seem to comprehend that this has little to do with the fundamental definition of public broadcasting as a unique service to the citizen. No one should be filtering perceptions of Canada but the people who live it, see it everyday and understand it from the perspective of their region of the country<sup>5</sup>.

If, as Skene suggests throughout his book, CBC executives exercise stringent control even over those who are recognized as creative and administrative talents within the CBC, it is highly unlikely that they would welcome or indeed tolerate the involvement of ordinary citizens who may be less familiar with, or supportive of, the corporation's current imperatives. One could argue that these citizens might be more easily manipulated into reinforcing the status quo. However, they might also suggest common sense or idealistic solutions to programming and administrative problems given their ignorance of, or disregard for, the internal and external political climate. Such solutions and the need to adhere to them would likely leave CBC administrators feeling uneasy.

In the United States, PBS avoids this uneasiness by privileging the opinions and input of expert advisory boards over those of their community counterparts. As William Hoynes explains in Public Television for Sale: Media,

the Market and the Public Sphere, community advisory boards play a very limited role, one designed to bring "television into the community" without bringing "the community more actively into public television"<sup>6</sup>. While community boards are primarily conceived as a technique to build the audience, expert advisory boards, are, in contrast:

...selected for their expertise, not to represent the public...One longtime staffer indicated that the expert boards are 'much more influential and useful to us than community advisors...Expert boards are a bunch of true authorities in the fields..They never get involved in telling us what to do about any individual programming'...The legitimacy of these boards derives precisely from the fact that their members are not perceived as the audience. On the contrary, expert advisors are perceived more as colleagues or as professionals with access to a scarce resource: knowledge<sup>7</sup>.

The justification for privileging expert boards is thus that these experts respect and reinforce public broadcasters' emphasis on journalistic independence and corporate autonomy.

In the end though, the most pervasive argument to justify limiting citizens' widespread participation in public broadcasting to the reactive role of the viewer feedback model is that it is both impractical and impossible to involve all or the majority of citizens who so wish in decision-making activities. Public broadcasters thus argue that even if citizens could assume decision-making responsibilities in an intelligent and systematic fashion, public broadcasting would be subject to an unwieldy and endless consultation process. Such a process would presumably stagnate both the creative and

administrative operations of the broadcasting institutions. This seemingly indisputable reality leads most citizens to accept the delegation of the responsibility for programming and administering this public trust to professionals. However, what public broadcasters sometimes forget is that citizens, in acquiescing this right to full participation and in placing their trust in third parties, not only expect, but increasingly insist, that public broadcasters be held accountable for both their programming and administrative decisions. Furthermore, when these decisions fundamentally affect not only the nature and the course of public broadcasting, but also citizens' communicative freedom, "ordinary" citizens demand to have a say in the process.

This poses a problem for many public broadcasters who are accustomed to the implicit support of the majority of the population and for whom the emphasis on accountability is a relatively recent phenomenon. As Willard D. Rowland Jr. explains with regards to PBS:

Educational broadcasting had long been exempt from concerns about accountability - it had, after all, been fostered primarily in the halls of higher education, where considerations of academic freedom and protection from intense direct public scrutiny usually prevailed. As an educationally 'liberal' activity, noncommercial broadcasting had also been accustomed to the benefit of the doubt about its social responsibilities - a presumption of inherent goodwill, progressivism and general improvement over what existed in the commercial realm<sup>8</sup>.

Given this general presumption of inherent quality and worth, it is perhaps not surprising that many public broadcasters have been ill-prepared to deal with accusations of paternalism and lack of accountability. What may come as a

surprise, however, is that the crutch public broadcasters most readily lean on when confronted with these charges only further undermines the development of mutually accountable behaviour.

For many public broadcasters, the issue of public accountability has traditionally been framed, first and foremost, as a question of creative and journalistic professionalism. According to Daniel Hallin, this traditional preoccupation with professionalization took root at the end of the Second World War when:

...the inadequacies of the libertarian model were evident (large private media conglomerates were not representative of the people's interests, effort to sell cultural commodities didn't jive with the notion of substantial and accurate reporting on current affairs, and pervasiveness of propaganda). The solution was the professionalization of journalism which in a sense set the journalists up as a surrogate public sphere, autonomous both with regard to the state and with regard to private interests, including in theory, those of their owners and advertisers<sup>9</sup>.

Clearly, despite their good intentions, journalists have never been free from private interests, particularly those of their owners and advertisers. More importantly, however, the problem with framing the issue of public accountability in terms of professionalism, is that when professionalism is defined as the crux of public broadcasters' responsibility to their respective citizenry, the development of mutual trust and accountability between media professionals and their audiences is relegated to a position of secondary or even tertiary importance.

Furthermore, as Jay Rosen rightly notes in "Making Journalism More Public": "Professionalization transforms the nature of political discourse. It narrows discussion to questions of technique and effectiveness that can be approached with detached realism"<sup>10</sup>. Hallin concurs noting: "The culture of professionalism is largely hostile to politics, preferring technical and administrative expertise or cynical detachment to engagement in the public sphere"<sup>11</sup>. As a result, when professionalism is the key concern, questions of journalistic integrity and accountability focus predominantly on the performative aspects of journalism. Such issues as journalistic accuracy, objectivity and appeal are thus pushed to the forefront in any discussion of public broadcasting accountability. These professional goals are fruitless, however, if they are pursued at the expense of the mutual trust and accountability implicit in the social contract between media professionals and citizens.

This line of reasoning is substantiated by Hans Mathias Kepplinger and Renate Kocher in their international study of professionalism in the media world. According to Kepplinger and Kocher's findings, journalists readily accept responsibility for the veracity, clarity and quality of their media reports, yet they refuse to accept responsibility for the consequences of the opinions or stories they formulate. Conversely, journalists consistently hold politicians, business leaders and scientists, among other public personalities, fully accountable for both the intentional and unintentional consequences of their words and actions.

As a result, "a discrepancy exists between their [journalists'] own willingness to accept responsibility and the degree of responsibility expected from other members of society"<sup>12</sup>. In their own defence, journalists and media professionals in general, would likely argue that since there is no way for creators of media messages to control how the information conveyed will be interpreted or used by viewers, they cannot be expected to be held accountable for the consequences of the mediation process.

The degree to which media professionals should be held accountable for the consequences of their creative and journalistic decisions remains debatable. At the very least, however, it is not reasonable for media professionals to impose on other public officials, a condition of discursive interaction that they are unwilling to abide by themselves. Whereas other public officials, particularly politicians, are continuously pressed by media professionals to justify any contradictions in their stated positions or any refusal to make public their knowledge or opinions, Kepplinger and Kocher found that:

...journalists can behave selectively towards their own judgements; that is, they do not have to show consistency or constancy in their judgements. Therefore, they do not have to document contradictory judgements or even give reasons for them. This applies not only to decisions about whether to grant media attention to certain individuals, events or subjects, but also the assessments made in commentaries and opinion pieces<sup>13</sup>.

This double standard in media accountability leads to what Robert Entman has deemed the paradox of "aggressiveness without accountability"<sup>14</sup>, that is to say, a situation in which journalists, despite their heightened cynicism and



scepticism, are increasingly unable to influence politicians and other officials to publicly account for their actions.

A vicious circle results as politicians' refusal to answer the journalists' aggressive and often preemptory questions creates the impression for the audience that officials are refusing to be honest and open with them, and thus perpetuates the perception that they are untrustworthy and unaccountable. The audience's scepticism and cynicism are heightened accordingly, making it unlikely that anything elected officials say or do in this forum of discursive interaction will be deemed credible by their constituents. Yet if public accountability is to be a meaningful and enforceable concept, it must be a two-way street.

This situation is further aggravated by the following irony: at the same time that journalists' aggressive, unaccountable behaviour serves to estrange constituents from their elected representatives, it also reinforces journalists' subjugation to the authority of the state. As Daniel Hallin explains:

...cast in the ultimately impossible role of neutral observers, journalists often wind up moving erratically and irresponsibly among a number of positions that are highly damaging to the process of political debate. At one moment they may take up the role of the neutral expert who denies that normative questions are meaningful. At another moment they may abdicate the normative role to government officials. It is not an accident that a closer relationship with the state develops along with the professionalization of journalism. Professionalization creates a problem of authority for the journalists...and one of the best ways of solving it is to borrow the authority of the state<sup>15</sup>.

As a result, rather than secure an arm's length stance from the state, recourse to notions of journalistic objectivity and professionalism only solidifies media organizations' links to the state, albeit at the expense of citizens' dialogue with both politicians and the media. Promoting mutual accountability both in and through public broadcasting must therefore begin with public broadcasters' recognition that notions of corporate autonomy and media professionalism can no longer be erected as barriers to public participation in the decision-making process.

#### Towards mutual accountability and participatory democracy

The next and crucial step to achieving participatory democracy and mutual accountability is for public broadcasters to promote and protect repeated and purposeful opportunities for citizens to participate in these decision-making activities. While it may be extremely difficult to preserve traditional notions of corporate independence and journalistic autonomy while attempting to involve the public in a meaningful way, there is little doubt that change is essential. At present, public broadcasting worldwide offers citizens little more than the semblance of participation in the decision-making process.

As Gertrude Robinson and Kai Hildebrandt note in their analysis of the efforts to democratize German public broadcasting:

....Germany's public broadcast services are increasingly organized for but not in response to the communication needs of its citizens. The German example has shown that in spite of the rethinking of broadcast issues necessitated by reunification, the bureaucratically organized information

and communication sectors continue to work through supervisory boards. These make large-scale public involvement nearly impossible and thus frustrate the communicative competence of individuals and groups in the political communication process. How to remedy this situation and move toward a more democratic system of public communication is at the heart of the public broadcasting debate in Europe<sup>16</sup>.

For this relationship to improve, public broadcasters worldwide must pay more than lip service to the decision-making potential of their respective citizens. Conversely, citizens must be willing to involve themselves in, and accept responsibility for, public broadcasting decision-making.

How might this mutual accountability between public broadcasters and their citizenry be achieved? Moreover, can and should citizens be held accountable for public broadcasting in the first place? To effectively argue that citizens and public broadcasters should be held mutually accountable requires the acceptance *a priori* of a definition of freedom which moves beyond the pure liberal conception of freedom as freedom from coercion. In other words, to justify mutual accountability between public broadcasters and their respective citizens, one must posit voluntary freedom, that of having a say in determining the alternatives, rather than volitional freedom, that of being relegated to choosing between predetermined alternatives, as the regulative ideal. As Karol Jakubowicz argues, communication understood as the empowerment to exercise voluntary freedom "combines both respect for the right to communicate as a basic human right and a way of satisfying a fundamental human need, and a view of participatory communication as satisfying a

fundamental social need, as a prerequisite for democracy and self-government"<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, when the exercise of voluntary freedom becomes the regulative ideal in public sphere deliberations, mutual accountability becomes not only desirable, but necessary for the constitution of a democratic public sphere. As Richard Bernstein explains:

Unlike its liberal counterparts, a constitutive community defines itself politically by viewing freedom not as protection for it but as a requirement in it. The community and the individuals who comprise it are in a reciprocal relation to one another; they are mutually constituted, a process that requires the community to be substantively democratic rather than merely regarded as democratic because it was freely chosen for instrumental or sentimental purposes. Community life is not, then, what democracy brings about, but what democracy is<sup>18</sup>.

As a result, insofar as democratic communication remains the organizing goal, citizens' participation in the process of determining both the purpose and the nature of discussions in the discursive arena that their public broadcasters represent is both each citizen's right and responsibility. Ideally, this responsibility to participate in decision-making activities should not be regarded by citizens as a burden, but rather as a well-sought invitation insofar as it "not only offers an opportunity to discover the common good and a way to examine its merits, but also develops and reveals individuals as rational and social beings capable of knowing a good in common they could not know alone"<sup>19</sup>.

While such a reciprocal relationship with public broadcasters may seem unwieldy at best and utopic at worst, it may well prove to be the only means

to overcome the limitations of a public broadcasting system fashioned either by market logic or nationalist imperatives. Both of these options reduce citizens' role to that of exercising volitional freedom and thus limit the possibility for meaningful human action. Whether it be subservience to market logic and to the predilections of the audience or subservience to nationalist imperatives and the predilections of the public, either of these forces when allowed to act unhampered, serve to reinforce the status quo and to naturalize the dominant groups' biases with regards to the types of programming which will be broadcast and the purposes of public television which will be promoted.

When market principles or audience aspirations are the sole criteria according to which programming is determined, citizens can only express their agreement or disagreement with predetermined programming options by choosing to become a member of the audience or not at any given time. Insofar as the act to view or not to view is an individual one, this decision is insufficient to significantly alter the available programming options. Moreover, even when audience members act in concert, their opinions and decision-making power are translated into ratings, a quantitative measure that poorly reflects their needs and interests. As Ien Ang points out, this opinion-expressing venue "does nothing other than register the volume of applause and as a form of information [or decision-making] applause generally tends to be particularly meaningful from the narcissistic perspective of the institutions themselves"<sup>20</sup>.

Similarly, when nationalist goals or public aspirations are the sole criteria according to which programming is determined, citizens are forced to embrace the goods which cultural and political elites, acting almost like surrogate parents, believe to be in their best interests. As Sylvia Harvey and Kevin Robins note in Britain, the advent of government regulated public broadcasting resulted in a scheme to "replace local variety and differences by a standard conception of culture and manners and to replace audience participation by a more distanced, authoritative and prescriptive approach to broadcasting"<sup>21</sup>. Insofar as citizens are unable to know or control the filtering of images, ideas and values which takes place before the programs are aired, they are equally impotent in their ability to significantly alter the content of available programming.

Yet while both the market and the state reproduce exclusionary mechanisms of their own, they also harbour powerful contradictions. The emancipatory potential of public broadcasting resides in the clash and juxtaposition of these inherent contradictions. When the market and the state act as counter-cutting forces to the disequilibrating tendencies displayed by one or the other when their powers are unlimited or unregulated, they have the potential to facilitate and stimulate civil society's ability to engage in what Negt and Kluge describe as the act of making "sense of the arbitrarily intersecting parameters of everyday life, individual life story and history"<sup>22</sup>. As a result, neither force should be subsumed to the other, but rather the tension between

the respective goods privileged by the market and the state must be heightened.

How can the tensions between market imperatives and state imperatives be effectively harnessed and heightened? In Twenty-first Century Capitalism, Robert Heilbroner suggests that the best scenario to imagine the possibilities of overcoming the present impasse of the market/state dichotomy is a society whose main tenet is participation. As Heilbroner explains, one might foresee:

...a society whose mode of cooperation is neither custom and tradition, nor centralized command, nor subservience to market pressures and incentives. Its integrating principle would be *participation* - the engagement of all citizens in the mutual determination of every phase of their economic lives through discussion and voting...Participation thus envisages a world in which widely shared decision-making by discussion and vote displaces decision-making by self-interest alone, or by persons privileged by wealth or position to make unilateral determinations<sup>23</sup>.

Such a society would not be one in which either the market or the state would be completely subsumed, but rather one in which citizens engaged in participatory democracy would limit the "moral vulnerability to the micro-order that emerges from market considerations"<sup>24</sup> as well as the moral vulnerability at the macro-order that emerges from an overbearing state. For such a society to be feasible, "social and economic equality [must] replace social and economic inequality as the widely endorsed norm...because equality seems best suited to enable individuals to lead the most rewarding lives they can"<sup>25</sup>.

In advancing this scenario, however, Heilbroner does not posit a participatory democratic society as the likely successor to capitalism by the end

of the 21st century. To the contrary, he states that "the transition is too difficult, the rearrangements too complex, and above all, the opposition too ferocious for any such truly revolutionary change to occur in so short a time"<sup>26</sup>. Yet despite his analytic scepticism that this ideal society could be realized in the coming century, he fully endorses the power of the ideas and ideals underlying a participatory society to fuel our consciousness and help us to envisage "another social destination in our imaginations"<sup>27</sup>.

Arguably then, if public broadcasters were to make this type of participatory democracy their ideal destination in terms of the relationship they seek to develop with their respective citizens, they could become discursive arenas in which the rights and responsibilities of participation could begin to be exercised. However, in keeping with the conditions proscribed by Habermas for the reemergence of the public sphere, before public broadcasters can begin to be envisaged as such arenas of discursive interaction, they must lead by example, demonstrating that they are "committed to the public sphere in [its] internal structures as well as in [its] relations with the State"<sup>28</sup>. Public broadcasters' willingness to attempt to move beyond a mode of cooperation which in the past has been based on tradition and centralized command, and more recently, which has relied on a subservience to market pressures, might thus mark the boundaries of their influence and relevance as integrative arenas of discursive interaction in and beyond the 21st century.



### Competing models of accountability and participatory democracy

For many public broadcasting proponents, promoting mutual accountability and participatory democracy both in and through public broadcasting begins with the recognition that public broadcasters must move beyond the viewer feedback model to communicate more directly and proactively with their audiences. However, while most proponents concur that more open and accountable communication is crucial, few agree on how this goal can best be achieved. As a result, strategies for involving the public more directly in public broadcasting decision-making, both as audience members and as citizens, vary considerably.

Some public broadcasting proponents believe that public broadcasters should adopt similar strategies to those used by their counterparts in the private sector. One would suspect that such a suggestion would come from critics of public broadcasting, not their supporters. However, to the contrary, those who advocate such a strategy often do so in full "connaissance de cause" of both the mandate of public broadcasting and the fallacies implicit in the sender-receiver model of communication. For example, consider the remarks of Hervé Bourges, former president of France's Antenne 2 and FR3, in a scholarly article entitled "Une ambition pour la télévision publique"<sup>29</sup>. Bourges readily acknowledges that the diversity of viewers' needs and expectations cannot be reduced to some miracle formula or mathematical equation. Rather, Bourges states that involving the public in broadcast decision-making depends upon a

moral commitment to continuous dialogical exchange between those who make the programs and those who view them. Bourges' acknowledgement of both the dialogical character and the complexity of the relationship between public broadcasters and their audiences, makes his solution to ensure widespread participation all the more puzzling.

In response to the lack of accountability and discursive exchange which currently characterize French citizens' relationship with their public broadcaster, Bourges affirms:

Pour qu'il ait échange, il faut qu'il ait dialogue, écoute. À l'échelle où se situent les mass médias, cela implique d'avoir recours au marketing. Et pourquoi pas? Faire une bonne télévision publique n'est pas un objectif abstrait. C'est la réponse adaptée à une demande qu'il convient d'analyser<sup>30</sup>.

While Bourges is right to suggest that public broadcasters must adapt their programming to citizens' needs, he gives no indication of how his recourse to marketing techniques will improve the quality of discursive exchanges between public broadcasters and their audiences. In fact, since marketing techniques normally entail defining audiences as socio-demographic entities to be conquered rather than as citizens to be served, Bourges' solution is both philosophically and practically opposed to the enhancement of participatory democracy. Clearly, citizens must be allowed to play a more significant role in the decision-making process than the one envisaged by Bourges.

Like Bourges, Canadian broadcasting scholar Ross Eaman believes that the key to meaningful public participation in public broadcasting decision-

making lies in more proactive and responsive audience research. Unlike Bourges, however, Eaman recognizes that the type of discursive exchanges which will lead to what he calls cultural democracy cannot be achieved through quantitative analysis based on rating indicators and marketing techniques. Nor is it simply a matter of privileging qualitative analysis rather than quantitative findings. As Eaman explains in Channels of Influence: CBC Audience Research and the Canadian Public, while qualitative research conducted by the CBC over the years has enabled participants to move beyond the binary opposition of traditional quantitative analysis, it still has two fundamental flaws. Based primarily on focus groups and viewing panels, CBC's qualitative research has been limited both by its emphasis on "fairly narrow program matters"<sup>31</sup> and by its tendency to consult audience members after the fact, that is to say, once the programs had already been produced and aired.

In contrast, Eaman argues that audience research which is intended to facilitate cultural democracy must extend its field of inquiry from a preoccupation with specific programs to questions of broader general significance for public broadcasting. Among the potential questions that Eaman contends that the Canadian public should be allowed to address are "...levels of Canadian content (assuming that minimum regulatory requirements are maintained); the relative emphasis on local, regional or national programming; and the balance between different programming categories"<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, in addressing these issues, Eaman stresses that the CBC must provide citizens

with an opportunity to comment on what the public broadcaster ought to be doing, rather than simply ask citizens to evaluate the broadcaster's actual or past degree of success in meeting its objectives. In emphasizing this latter point, Eaman addresses a concern raised by Charlotte Brundson who noted that "the problem with working always with what people are, of necessity, watching, is that we don't really ever address that there may be something else that people might like to watch"<sup>33</sup>. Eaman's argument that Canadians should be given a proactive voice in public broadcasting decision-making thus fundamentally shifts the research terrain away from traditional audience research to public consultation on issues of broad significance for public broadcasting.

Yet as Eaman notes, four criteria would have to be satisfied to ensure meaningful public participation in public broadcasting decision-making:

First, its [the public's] input would have to be regular; it would not suffice that it be consulted every three or four years in the manner of elections. Second, since it would not be possible for all Canadians to be involved personally or directly, those who do participate would have to constitute a representative sample of Canadians. Third, participation would have to be treated more or less equally in the way that everyone's vote in an election counts the same. And finally, the input that is obtained would have to be meaningful in the sense of relating to matters of consequence rather than to trivial programming considerations<sup>34</sup>.

Significantly, however, Eaman's blueprint details no mechanisms to promote mutual accountability. In other words, there are no provisions to increase the likelihood that citizens' input as members of both the public and the audience

will be a crucial factor in public broadcasters' subsequent decisions.

Therefore, despite Eaman's rightful claim that "the only meaningful measure of cultural identity is the degree to which all members of society are engaged in the joint process of cultural production<sup>35</sup>", his model still relegates citizens to opinion-forming roles, all be they proactive, rather than reactive ones. The risk that such public consultation exercises deteriorate into attempts to gain support for predetermined courses of action, rather than provide meaningful opportunities to dictate programming and administrative decision-making, thus remains very real. In the end then, Eaman's model, despite its laudable premise, may offer little more than the semblance of public involvement which currently characterizes much of public broadcasting decision-making.

Notably, Ross Eaman is not the only broadcasting scholar to propose an innovative model of public participation in broadcast decision-making and yet fail to address appropriate mechanisms to develop mutual accountability between public broadcasters and citizens. In an article entitled "Pour un service public sans mission"<sup>36</sup>, Belgium broadcasting scholar Bernard Cache suggests that public broadcasting programming and operations should be sanctioned not according to audience ratings or state objectives, but rather by a vote of justification. As Cache explains, while audience research asks viewers: "Did you watch this or that show?", a vote of justification would ask citizens: "Is it in keeping with the societal goals to support this or that type of

broadcasting service?"<sup>37</sup>. More specifically, Cache writes:

La question adressée au citoyen est de savoir si la programmation offerte est bien pondérée, si elle est adéquate à l'idée que chacun d'entre nous se fait de la société en tant que communautés de communautés. Bref, ce qui est en question dans la télévision de service public, c'est la possibilité d'un mode de socialisation autre que celui de la marchandise...le vote de justification du service public signerait un contrat de socialisation non marchande entre la communauté des citoyens et la diversité des communautés d'individus<sup>38</sup>.

Importantly, while audience ratings seek only people's opinions as members of the audience and particularly favour those who are frequent viewers, Cache's model gives all citizens, regardless of their viewing habits, an equal say as to public broadcasting's relevance to societal goals.

Yet the extent to which Cache's vote of justification enables citizens to participate in the process of determining the substantive content of public broadcasting programming and administration is somewhat uncertain. Cache's proposed vote of justification clearly asks citizens to be accountable to their public broadcasters by formally and publicly acknowledging their commitment to, and support for, this public service. According to Cache's model, however, public broadcasters' similar commitment to respect and respond to the needs of their citizens is more tenuous. Cache suggests that public broadcasters should be freed *a priori* from the imposition of any specific mandate in order for them to become experimental arenas for innovative and diverse programming formats and genres. In this context, Cache argues, the vote of justification functions as an obligation for permanent research. The vote would thus be the

indicator which would guide and stimulate public broadcasters to continuously remodel their programming.

This vision of public broadcasting as a site for innovation and diversity is clearly in keeping with the development of the communicative ethics implicit in the ideal of democratic communication. Unfortunately, however, Cache's model rests on an understanding of accountability that is unlikely to warrant citizens' trust because it provides little opportunity for them to fundamentally influence the decision-making process should public broadcasters fall short of their expectations. Although Cache does not state as much, should a public broadcaster fail to meet their expectations, citizens could presumably hold public broadcasters accountable by withholding support in the next vote of justification. However, such a move is more likely to further jeopardize the already precarious funding of many public broadcasters rather than address the underlying and crucial issue of how to make a given public broadcaster's programming and administration more relevant to its citizens. Therefore, while the vote of justification represents an interesting means to reaffirm and redefine public broadcasters' social contract with their respective citizenry, it is an insufficient mechanism, in and of itself, to promote meaningful public participation and mutual accountability in broadcast decision-making.

Part of the problem with both Cache's and Eaman's attempts to make public broadcasting more accessible and accountable to the citizens it serves, is that the solutions they provide offer a singular and restricted way for citizens

to exercise their freedom of communication. In Cache's model, citizens can only exercise their freedom by voting; in Eaman's model, they do so by participating in public consultation processes. However, as was argued in Chapter 3, achieving a truly participatory democracy with regards to public broadcasting requires that both the opportunities and the locations in which to exercise this freedom of communication be varied, diverse, and where fruitful, complementary.

Moreover, neither of these models provide clear-cut avenues for some citizens, in some circumstances, to move beyond opinion-forming roles to assume authoritative decision-making responsibilities. Admittedly, Eaman's model, with its emphasis on representative participation in public consultation processes, points to the possibility of a more active role for some citizens. However, it offers no safeguards to ensure the participation in decision-making of those who would so choose, nor the accountability of those who will ultimately make these administrative and programming decisions. Likewise, the intent of Cache's vote of justification is laudable in that it moves public broadcasting decision-making beyond the binary opposition of market or state rule. In the end, though, the need to ensure that this voting process is conducted in a timely and cost-effective manner will almost certainly limit citizens' answers to a binary opposition, one where, in Baudrillard's terms, "the answer is already called forth by the question"<sup>39</sup>. In both these models then, citizens are guaranteed only the opportunity to exercise negative freedom.



Therefore, for either of these models to be effective tools for developing mutual accountability and participatory democracy in and through broadcasting, additional mechanisms would be required to ensure citizens' right both to periodically participate as decision-makers and to call public broadcasters to formally and satisfactorily account for their actions.

Answers to some of the problems raised by these two models can be found in the work of British broadcasting scholar, Jay G. Blumler and German broadcasting scholar Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem. In "Toward Renewed Public Accountability in Broadcasting", the authors detail both the aims of public accountability and the means to achieve it<sup>40</sup>. According to Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem, the goals that motivate the calls for more consistent and substantive public accountability include concerns for:

...bringing matters to light, by securing explanations and justifications from those responsible for the activities and politics they have pursued over a period; probing adequacy by exposing the authorities to criticism and pressures for change; giving a hearing to alternative needs and ideas from outside official decision-taking circles; and 'inducing a sense of responsibility in those who are called to account'<sup>41</sup>.

Their analysis is particularly interesting because they emphasize a wide variety of complementary means to promote accountability; means which enable a variety of citizens, according to their diverse needs and areas of expertise, to participate more fully in media affairs.

To this end, Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem are quick to point out that in most countries with long-standing public broadcasting traditions, there are

already several mechanisms in place to discuss and review public broadcasting decision-making. As they rightly note, public broadcasting has traditionally been held accountable in 1) regular reports from public broadcasting boards; 2) parliamentary debates; 3) written and oral debates and exchanges amongst media professionals; 4) public and academic discussion regarding controversial programme practices, standards and innovations; and 5) periodic reviews by independent, publicly appointed commissions<sup>42</sup>. The fundamental and unresolved problem with these traditional mechanisms to invite participation and promote accountability in broadcasting, however, is that the realm of those licensed to participate has been, and remains, fairly narrow. As Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem explain, public broadcasting decision-making and accountability has been primarily the purview of broadcasters and politicians rather than that of citizens at large.

Where Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's blueprint differs from traditional accountability measures is in what they suggest should be both the scope and the intent of these mechanisms' and groups' activities. Generally speaking, these authors are advocating that broadcast employees, social scientists, special interest groups and cultural critics, together with the organizations through which they intervene, take a greater interest in, and assume a greater responsibility for, the broad issues that affect public broadcasting decision-making. Rather than limit their interventions in public broadcasting debates to issues or fora of strategic importance to the specific interests they represent,

Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem encourage these groups to assume greater ownership of public broadcasting decisions and goals as a whole. In this sense then, they are asking these groups to become entities through which citizens can publicly express their commitment to, and expectations of public broadcasting. This commitment includes an expectation that public broadcasters will be accountable to the citizens they are mandated to serve.

Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's accountability model also addresses two of the limitations of the models proposed by Eaman and Cache. First, they provide a combination of avenues and means for participating in public broadcasting decision-making. The variety of entry points to public broadcasting decision-making proposed by Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem suggests a multiplicity of ways in which citizens can exercise their democratic right to participate in public broadcasting processes. Second, Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's model calls all citizens who are urged to participate in public broadcasting decision-making to be accountable for their actions and words; a crucial element of accountability that neither Eaman's nor Cache's models fundamentally addressed. This heightened sense of accountability is evident in Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's calls for cultural critics to use their airtime and print space more effectively in order to play an active role in constructively criticizing proposed broadcasting policies and goals. It also manifests itself in the authors' insistence that those groups who are mandated to represent citizens' interests in public broadcasting debates should do so "...armed with

a mature and independently conceived sense of what the interests of audience members are... [in order to] challenge simplistic and inadequate characterizations of viewer's interests whenever these surface in broadcasters' utterances and policy justifications"<sup>43</sup>.

What Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's model of accountability fails to provide, however, is adequate safeguards to ensure that public broadcasters will accept the same degree of accountability for their words and actions as that expected of citizens who intervene in public broadcasting affairs. Ironically, Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem recognize that public calls for accountability have traditionally been met by "insular attitudes among broadcasters of all stripes, including their tendency to 'take refuge, like a crack regiment in their presumed professional excellence'"<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, they concede that "the urgencies and engrossing gameship of intensified multichannel contention"<sup>45</sup> is likely to increase the degree to which public interest concerns and questions of accountability could be further sidelined. Yet despite these acknowledgements, the burden of enforcing public broadcasting accountability is placed squarely on the shoulders of those who are not authorized to make the key administrative and programming decisions. According to Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's model, it is the force of public opinion which must call public broadcasters to account, without so much as the vote of justification proposed by Cache as a lever to force public broadcasters' hand. Stated otherwise, while Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem's

model *quantitatively* increases the variety of avenues through which citizens can participate in public broadcasting affairs and promote accountability, it does not *qualitatively* enhance their decision-making roles, nor does it provide them with mechanisms to enforce accountability. In the end then, Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem, like Eaman and Cache, limit citizens' participation in broadcast decision-making to predominantly opinion-forming roles.

How then can the ideas to promote accountability and increase public participation in broadcasting suggested by Eaman, Cache, Blumler and Hoffmann-Riem be combined with other strategies to ensure effective participation and mutual accountability? The four models examined to date are primarily concerned with strengthening citizens' ability to autonomously form and convey their opinions about public broadcasting to those who are ultimately responsible for decision-taking. Yet the question remains: how can an emphasis on renewed accountability and participation begin to transfer decision-taking responsibilities more directly into the hands of citizens?

One such model was proposed by Robert Paul Wolff who believed that more democratic and accountable participation in and through broadcasting would best be achieved by making television a tool of direct democracy. Admittedly, Wolff's proposal is more radical than most models of direct democracy. However, it illustrates the logical conclusion to which the internalization of the assumptions underlying direct democracy leads. Writing in 1970, Wolff proposed a system whereby the television set would become

the medium through which American citizens would regularly register their votes on a wide range of issues before Congress, including decisions which affect public broadcasting<sup>46</sup>. Wolff envisaged public participation in decision-making processes as follows:

Each evening, at the time which is now devoted to news programs, there would be a nationwide all-stations show to debate on the issues before the nation. Bills...would be debated by representatives of alternative points of view. There would be background briefings on technically complex questions, as well as formal debates, question periods and so forth...Each Friday, after a week of debate and discussion, a voting session would be held. The measures would be put to the public, one by one, and the nation would record its preferences instantaneously by means of machines<sup>47</sup>.

Wolff's model also included provisions for seeking the input of experts, for involving official public dissenters in the debates and for providing alternative voting mechanisms for those who would not be in front of their televisions sets at the time of the actual vote. Significantly, the result of these votes would be binding and would reflect majority rule.

While there is little doubt that the model proposed by Wolff is intended to transfer more decision-making responsibilities into the hands of citizens, it is highly unlikely that this model will lead to meaningful public participation and mutual accountability. Rather than contribute to the creation of a more active citizenry and the revitalization of the public sphere, this model would likely further polarize debates by undermining both the complexity and the multi-faceted aims of these decision-making processes. Wolff's model is also

plagued by numerous administrative and structural problems, not the least of which is the fact that his model subjects citizens to the tyranny of a relentless obligation to vote on issues of which they may have little interest or knowledge.

However, in keeping with the purpose of the present discussion, the main reason this model must be rejected is that it sets up broadcasting as a mechanism to placate citizens by leading them to believe that via their end of the week vote, they play a meaningful role in determining issues of public importance. As Dale Bertelsen argues in "Media Form and Government Democracy as an Archetypal Image in the Electronic Age":

The home entertainment centre allows viewers to selectively create a political viewpoint while at the same time removing most of them from actual participation in the democratic process. Participation in political decision-making is predominantly limited to endorsing the democratic process through a number of confirming rituals. Voting, polling and referendum in an electronic age act as means of self-affirmation rather than as political participation. In this view, exercising a choice of aye or nay, becoming part of a percentage of attitudes, or approving a course in policy about whose formation they had little to say only aligns people with political decisions<sup>48</sup>.

To adopt Wolff's model would thus be to use broadcasting as an instrument through which citizens are provided a semblance of participation and power in decision-making processes, when in fact they have little or no control over the substantive elements of the issues and decisions at stake.

Creating a conducive environment for mutual accountability and participatory democracy

How then can mutual accountability and participatory democracy be heightened in public broadcasting decision-making and programming? Does the foregoing critique suggest that television is epistemically incapable of contributing meaningfully to the revitalization of democracy in the public sphere? Or do the traditional institutional and journalistic assumptions underlying public broadcasting make it systematically impossible to achieve these goals? If public broadcasting still has a contribution to make to democracy, what revised assumptions must underlie the search for a new means of interaction between citizens and their respective public broadcasters?

Arguably, there are at least five assumptions that must underlie any attempt to achieve mutual accountability and participatory democracy both in and through public broadcasting. First and foremost, any strategy or model must be premised on a fundamental belief in citizens' ability and responsibility to autonomously assume decision-making roles. Or as John Dewey succinctly put it: "Democracy is reflective faith in the capacity of all human beings for intelligent judgement, deliberations and actions if the proper conditions are furnished"<sup>49</sup>. Significantly, the conditions of which Dewey speaks need not entail that all citizens participate in deliberations and decision-making at the same time, at the same level, in the same arena or in the same capacity.

Contrary to what proponents of direct democracy would have us believe, such an arrangement would not guarantee all citizens' equality because it fails to



acknowledge citizens' diversity. As a result, it prevents them from freely choosing to exercise their diverse abilities or to pursue their diverse interests as they see fit. Moreover, such an emphasis on equality on all levels and in all instances displays a failure to understand that "hierarchical power is not inevitably oppressive any more than all authority is inherently exploitative"<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, once we accept that all citizens have both a right and a responsibility to periodically assume decision-making roles, the real challenge is to determine, and then bring about, the conditions that will enable citizens to assume these decision-making roles when they are so inclined, or when their community seeks their involvement, or when they can justify their potential to make a valuable contribution to the deliberations.

Second, any strategy to promote mutual accountability and participatory democracy both in and through public broadcasting must proceed from the assumption that citizens' involvement in decision-making processes is not only, or even predominantly, about the authoritative power to dictate societal goals and goods. It is also and equally importantly about individuals' and groups' attempts "to construct a viable life and sense of identity by acting on and in the world"<sup>51</sup>. As John Hartley explains: "...democratic participation is at the same time both performative and pedagogic, dramatizing and explaining, showing and teaching, at the very moment of responsible self-representation and decision-making"<sup>52</sup>. In other words, it is the continuous and reflexive process of self-definition and self-representation that fundamentally motivates

citizens' involvement with, and demands of, the institutions which affect the enactment of their identities and the realization of their life goals. As a result, for mutual accountability and participatory democracy to be meaningful concepts, it is not sufficient for citizens to rationally acknowledge the goals and activities of public institutions such as public broadcasting. They must also recognize them and endorse them as their own. Any mechanism envisaged to promote mutual accountability and participatory democracy must therefore address these abstract systems' central role in what Phillip Cassell describes as "the formation and the continuity of the self"<sup>53</sup>.

Third, since it is neither desirable nor possible for all citizens to participate in all decision-making processes, efficient and effective safeguards are required to enable those citizens who are unable to participate in a given process to question the actions and decisions of those citizens who did. These accountability mechanisms should facilitate the potential for both the biodegradability and the reversibility of decisions in light of new or revised input from the affected individuals or communities. At the same time, however, these accountability mechanisms should not needlessly undermine the decision-making powers of those who have been legitimately entrusted with these decision-making responsibilities in the first place. Neither accountability without trust, nor trust without accountability, will lead to the vibrant, reflexive and democratic communication that participatory democracy in and through public broadcasting is intended to promote.

As Anthony Giddens argues:

Trust without accountability is likely to become one-sided, that is, to slide into dependence; accountability without trust is impossible because it would mean the continual scrutiny of the motives and actions of the other. Trust entails the trustworthiness of the other - according 'credit' that does not require continual auditing, but which can be made open to inspection periodically if necessary. Being regarded as trustworthy by a partner is a recognition of personal integrity, but in an egalitarian setting such integrity means also revealing reasons for actions if called upon to do so - and in fact, having good reasons for any actions which affect the life of the other<sup>54</sup>.

The benchmark for both the calls for accountability and the explanations provided for the actions and/or decisions taken, would thus be that they be *reasonable* demands and answers. Clearly, what is considered reasonable would fluctuate from society to society and from issue to issue. As a result, the accountability mechanisms themselves would continuously be subjected to debate and modification according to the needs and expectations of the citizens and broadcasters they are intended to serve.

Fourth, new forms of inter-public coordination would have to foreground the conditions which will lead citizens to exercise the degree of freedom and to enjoy the degree of equality required for mutual accountability and participatory democracy to flourish. Significantly, however, it does not suffice to simply recognize these aims as fundamental to the accountability and participation process. The realization of these aims must be based on a delineation of rights with accompanying responsibilities and a delineation of principles to justify freedom with accompanying provisions to justify

interference<sup>55</sup>. If privileges and duties do not go hand in hand, then mutual accountability and participatory democracy deteriorate into one-sided propositions that benefit neither citizens nor public broadcasters in the end.

Finally and most crucially, in the same way that no one group of citizens should be burdened or entrusted with the bulk of decision-making responsibilities, it would be foolish to assume that public broadcasting could be the only, or even the primary, mechanism through which all citizens exercise their rights and responsibilities to participate in decision-making activities. Clearly, given the complexity and the diversity of both the deliberants and the issues, public broadcasting can only be one among many institutions that is committed to mutual accountability and participatory democracy in its internal and external relations. Moreover, even if public broadcasters were to become innovators in this area, they would not be able to sustain this new relationship with citizens if they were the only arena in which mutual accountability and participatory democracy were exercised.

Public broadcasters' success in achieving these goals is thus inextricably bound to both the will of the citizens they serve and the tendencies towards democratic and accountable behaviour implicit in the societies in which they operate. The fallacy then, underlying models such as the one proposed by Wolff to democratize the media and/or use the media for the democratization of society, is that these models attempt to set up television as the sole or dominant medium through which all political activity will be determined. In so

doing, they undermine the complexity of democratic initiatives, limiting active participation to a final vote in one forum, rather than extending it to the entire process. As Nicholas Negroponte notes: "That process can be the fantasy and ecstasy of one mind, or it can be the collective imagination of many, or it can be the vision of a revolutionary group"<sup>56</sup>.

No matter how the process is defined, it is in shifting the emphasis away from the professionalization of the journalistic *product* towards the mutual accountability of the communicative *process* that public broadcasters can begin to envisage new democratic and participatory initiatives that may help to reinvigorate deliberations in the public sphere. Greater focus on the process of public communication, would force public broadcasters to confront their traditional lack of confidence in citizens' autonomy and decision-making abilities. It would also result in a greater recognition of the pivotal importance of acts of self- definition, awareness and reflexivity implicit in the relations between public broadcasters and their audiences.

Furthermore, such an emphasis on the process would serve as a powerful reminder to public broadcasters that neither trust without accountability, nor rights without responsibilities can be sustained indefinitely. Rather, public broadcasters would likely be led to the realization that they need to move quickly to ensure the flexibility, biodegradability and, if required, reversibility of their decision-making processes. The end result would be to underscore the multi-dimensional and multi-faceted nature of citizens'

interaction with, and expectations of, public broadcasting, as one among many potential means for them to exercise their privileges and duties as citizens. When public broadcasters begin to emphasize all these crucial elements of the communicative process, rather than focus predominantly on the end product, then teledemocracy will become truly possible, not in the sense of creating a direct democracy run by electronic plebiscite, but in the sense of making pluralistic dialogues via the media possible<sup>57</sup>.

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## **REINVENTING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC BROADCASTING: ONE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE**

In the previous chapters, attention focused on the problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the public sphere and their application to public broadcasting in general. In this chapter, the discussion shifts to a case study which poignantly illustrates not only the perils of uncritically internalizing these assumptions, but also the radical possibilities that a revised interpretation of public broadcasting and the public sphere present. The events in question surround the elimination of local CBC programming in Windsor (Ontario); a decision announced by then CBC President Gérard Veilleux on 6 December 1990.

This case study will demonstrate how the ideal of democratic communication is undermined when the assumptions discussed in chapters 3-5 are allowed to dictate public broadcasters' relationships with their respective citizens. It will also provide an opportunity to further explore, in a particular historical and cultural context, the tensions implicit in the ideal underlying the public broadcasting project. Most importantly, however, Windsor residents' concerted efforts to reinvent their relationship with the CBC - their national public broadcaster - will highlight practical and pertinent ways in which local communities can contribute to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication and the revitalization of the public sphere.

To begin, I trace the history of the Windsor television station from its inception in 1954, through its transition to a publicly owned and operated station in 1975, to its designation as a regional journalistic bureau in 1990. Once the history of Channel 9 and its contribution to the local community have been documented, I chronicle the CBC's decision to eliminate all local programming in Windsor, including the supper-hour newscasts, as of 6 December 1990. As I illustrate, Windsor residents' response to the elimination of what they clearly viewed as a communication entitlement, led to a multi-front offensive to preserve local programming. Rooted in both a spontaneous uprising of Windsor's civil society and a well-organized and orchestrated community response to the elimination of local television news, Windsor residents fought to reverse the Corporation's decision wherever and however they could. They protested in the streets and in the courts; in the newspapers and in Parliament; in their living rooms and in the CRTC board rooms. Significantly, however, the citizens of Windsor did not limit their protests to a reactive defense of the status quo. Rather, they sought innovative and community-based solutions to the CBC impasse; proactive solutions which had the potential to revitalize both the ideal of democratic communication and their local arenas of discursive interaction.

Having examined the local response to the CBC's decision, I dedicate the bulk of this chapter to an analysis of Windsor residents' attempts to confront and refute the three problematic assumptions underlying traditional

understanding of both public broadcasting and the public sphere. In particular, I will demonstrate that, unlike CBC administrators, residents of Windsor emphasized, first and foremost, the crucial role that local access points play in the definition and enactment of social identities and group opinion formation. To this end, I will indicate how and why Windsor residents refused to have their needs and interests subsumed to public broadcasting goals which were defined without their input and without concern for their discursive welfare. Furthermore, I will explain how the citizens of Windsor, in asserting their democratic right and responsibility to be involved in public broadcasting decision-making, also insisted that the CBC be held accountable for its actions. Before entering into this detailed analysis, I will raise a number of key questions that link the problematic assumptions discussed throughout this thesis to the specifics of the Windsor case study. Also, by way of revision, I will provide a brief summary of the key arguments made in chapters 3-5.

The supporting material for this chapter was assembled from a variety of sources. *The Windsor Star* provided detailed and ongoing coverage of the key issues and developments as understood from the perspective of Windsor residents and politicians. In addition, I was granted access to the "Save the CBC" campaign files archived in the Mayor's Office of the City of Windsor. These files contained committee minutes, letters from the public, official correspondence with the CBC and interventions and presentations to the CRTC. To complement this written documentation, I interviewed the principle figures

who were at the centre of the dispute between the City of Windsor and the CBC. Among the interviewees were Jane Boyd, assistant to the mayor and behind-the-scenes coordinator of the campaign; Howard Pawley, co-chair of the Other Options Committee and one of the chief negotiators with the CBC; Professor Emeritus Hugh Edmonds who wrote the brief presented by the City of Windsor to the CRTC; and Ted Shaw, television critic for *The Windsor Star*, who covered the story as it unfolded.

I also interviewed past and present CBC employees from the Windsor area. Among those interviewed were station manager Bruce Taylor who saw the CBET-TV through this transitional period; veteran journalist Percy Hatfield, one of three remaining journalists after the reduction of CBET-TV to the status of a journalistic bureau; and Marshall Gray and Roger Faubert, two former CBET-TV producers who provided historical insight into the Windsor station's operations. Although these employees spoke frankly about the dispute, the perspective of CBC management was more difficult to glean. For example, the minutes of the CBC board of directors' meetings were inaccessible as these documents are sealed for a period of twenty-five years. Likewise, attempts to access CBC research such as focus group studies conducted once the CBC decided to reinstate local news in Windsor were also denied because these studies were commissioned by individual station managers and thus could not be released without their consent.

Moreover, many members of the 1990 CBC management team have since retired from or left the Corporation. As a result, they cannot comment officially, on behalf of the Corporation, as to the long-term implications of the 1990 events. Given these constraints, CBC management's rationale and position with regards to the elimination of local news in Windsor was pieced together from the comments and opinions available on the public record. These documents include official CBC correspondence with the Mayor's Office in Windsor, CBC presentations and interventions to the CRTC, journalistic interviews and comments made privately to members of the "Save the CBC" campaign team. One of the key limitations of this research is thus the extent to which it is dependent upon publicly available information to assess the CBC's position on this decision. Conversely, however, the insularity of both CBC management and its board of directors only serves to highlight the distance that these administrators maintain vis-à-vis the citizens they are intended to serve.

A second element of this research that could easily be questioned is the widespread applicability of the Windsor decision to other case studies. As shall be explained, the Windsor television market is unique in Canada in that it is considered to be part of the Detroit market where program purchase and transmission is concerned. It is precisely this uniqueness that Windsor residents and politicians emphasized in their fight to restore local programming. This then raises the question: If Windsor is unique in its predicament, how can

its struggle inform other communities' efforts to reinvent their relationships with their national public broadcaster? The fact that Windsor - the Canadian community with the highest consumption of American television programming and the one often deemed to be among the most Americanized border communities - would fight so vehemently to maintain indigenous local broadcasts, suggests that there are indeed lessons to be learned from its experience. Arguably, in the same way that many European countries studied the "Canadianization" of Canadian television to avoid a similar fate, other Canadian communities can benefit from the analysis of Windsor residents' attempts to create an open, autonomous, participatory and accountable relationship with the CBC.

#### Channel 9 from 1953 to 1990

The history of local television programming in Windsor began on 28 March 1953, when the popular local CKLW radio station was granted a television license for Channel 9.<sup>1</sup> The construction of the television facilities began on 15 December 1953, and nine months later, on 16 September 1954, the first program was broadcast from the new television studio<sup>2</sup>. CKLW corporation owned and operated this television station until 1963 when the American company RKO General, a division of General Tire and Rubber Company, purchased the operation<sup>3</sup>. Windsor residents who had had access to American television signals since 1944<sup>4</sup> - long before most Canadians had a television set in their homes - appreciated the local coverage CKLW provided.



However, as one historical account of this period suggests:

...usually only one out of seven stories on its noon newscast was from Windsor. And almost any story from Detroit overshadowed any Windsor story. Channel 9's total news audience was less than a tenth that of Windsor viewers watching Detroit news. This was unacceptable and prompted the formation of a citizen's group that, with other voices such as *The Windsor Star*, argued before the CRTC that the station should be made Canadian<sup>5</sup>.

As a result of these interventions, the CRTC issued an order in Council in 1969 which forced RKO to divest itself of the Windsor CKLW television station. According to the CRTC edict, CKLW-TV would now be expected to comply with the 80 per cent Canadian ownership rule<sup>6</sup>.

The following year, the CRTC ordered the CBC to assume control of the Windsor station but the CBC contested the CRTC's edict on financial grounds. Given that the CBC lacked the funds to shoulder sole responsibility for CKLW-TV, the CRTC sanctioned a partnership agreement between the CBC and Bassett's Baton Broadcasting<sup>7</sup>. Under the terms of this private-public consortium, Baton would own 75 per cent of the station, while the CBC would retain a 25 per cent share<sup>8</sup>. This measure which brought the station under Canadian ownership and control also designated the station as a CBC affiliate. The conditions of license included a commitment to produce 16 hours per week of local live programming<sup>9</sup>. Significantly, however, this agreement was only a temporary measure. In granting this joint license, the CRTC clearly stated that the station should be 100 per cent CBC owned and operated by 1975<sup>10</sup>.

As might have been anticipated, when the moment for license renewal came, the Baton Broadcasting Corporation sought permission to apply for a renewal of its actual license to operate the station. Baton attempted to mount a public campaign to back its continued control of the station; however there was little ground swell support for this option<sup>11</sup>. As a result, despite its desire to maintain control of CKLW-TV, the CRTC refused Baton's request in June 1974<sup>12</sup>. Among the CRTC's reasons for insisting on CBC control of the station was the CRTC's belief that Windsor, given its proximity to Detroit and its greater exposure to American television signals, had television needs so unique and pressing that only the national public broadcaster could fulfil them. Consequently, in announcing its decision to Baton, the CRTC also indicated its intention to make CBC the sole applicant authorized to compete for ownership of the Windsor station<sup>13</sup>.

On 6 May 1975, in Hamilton (Ontario), the CRTC heard the CBC's application to own and operate CKLW-TV Windsor. In presenting its application, the CBC addressed the nationalist concerns voiced by the CRTC in its earlier decision, promising to make CKLW-TV "a station that not only *is* Canadian, but *appears* to be Canadian"<sup>14</sup>. In keeping with this goal, the CBC committed itself to "increased news coverage on the week-ends, plus 60 minutes of news and current affairs...on weekdays"<sup>15</sup>. The CBC also indicated its intention to increase the staff from the actual 115 employees to 135<sup>16</sup>. Based on these commitments, the CBC was granted a license to exclusively

own and operate the Windsor station. For its part, Baton was forced to sell its majority holdings in CKLW-TV. When the change of ownership became official on 1 September 1975, the station's call letters were changed to CBET-TV.

The CBC's sudden interest in acquiring the Windsor station - when only five years earlier it had contested this responsibility - was not the result of altruistic concern about the americanization process affecting the citizens of Windsor. By 1975, CKLW-TV was a profitable and productive station; an excellent investment for any broadcaster. According to professor emeritus Hugh Edmonds, "By 1975, Channel 9 had captured the largest share of the audience during the supper hour and overall was a very viable commercial asset"<sup>17</sup>. The station also boasted a qualified and innovative staff. As Roger Faubert, former CBET-TV employee explains: "We had a certain style and discipline that was very appealing to the CBC...We represented network quality programming at regional levels"<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, as Faubert notes, having functioned as a private station for over 20 years, the staff had developed a dynamic, competitive approach to programming. As he recalls: "The prop person to the producer had a shotgun or fighter pilot mentality with regards to production...We had enough confidence to be able to accomplish any directive"<sup>19</sup>.

Nevertheless, despite its self-confidence, the staff welcomed the CBC's acquisition of the station with a certain amount of trepidation. As Faubert

notes, the CBC acquisition was a double edged sword for CKLW-TV employees: "CBC meant a lot of money, a lot of equipment, but a lot of restrictions...and there was also this sense that if you weren't in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, you weren't that great"<sup>20</sup>. This sentiment was repeatedly confirmed over the years by the fact that "whenever anyone came from Toronto or Ottawa, they had no idea of what we [CBET employees] were about"<sup>21</sup>. While the station may have received little direction or support from head office, in the late 1970s and early 1980s local programming succeeded in building a very significant following. As Edmonds explains: "They had created a sense of identity between the staff and the community"<sup>22</sup>. However, this sense of community ownership of, and interest in, local television "was not identified with the CBC, but rather with a local station doing a local job"<sup>23</sup>.

During this period the station also managed to fulfil another of the roles contemplated for it by the CBC administration. Given its U.S. reach it was thought that CBET-TV could serve as an entry point for Canadian programs into the U.S. market. According to Marshall Gray, former executive producer of *Agriscope*, a weekly series dedicated to agricultural interests and activities, several local Windsor programs did succeed in attracting many loyal U.S. viewers<sup>24</sup>. As Gray explains: "*Agriscope* really took off in Michigan and Ohio. We were often invited to Michigan State. They would continually ask us: 'When can you come and do this story?'"<sup>25</sup>. Other former CBET employees concurred noting that in its 1970s heyday, Windsor television counted among

its successes a live children's show and dance program which drew viewers and participants from both sides of the border<sup>26</sup>.

All this was to change in the 1980s when the financially strapped public broadcaster would begin downscaling its operations and reducing its commitment to local television programming. In 1984, 52 jobs were eliminated at Windsor CBET-TV in the wake of sweeping cuts announced by the newly elected Tory government. These cuts lead to the cancellation of all programming except local news<sup>27</sup>. By the time of its license renewal in 1989, the CBC had reduced its commitment to local television programming in Windsor to 11 hours per week<sup>28</sup>. This decision resulted in the elimination of local week-end news. While these cuts were contested by many including NABET, local 75, Windsor, the CRTC rubber stamped this proposed reduction in the number of hours of local CBET programming. However, the Commission did encourage the CBC "to explore various means of increasing the level of local productions on CBET in the context of the resources currently available to the Corporation"<sup>29</sup>. Yet contrary to the CRTC recommendation, these cuts were, in retrospect, subdued compared to what awaited the CBET-TV staff and the citizens of Windsor the following year.

#### The elimination of local programming

On December 6, 1990, local CBC programming in Windsor was abruptly cancelled as a result of one of the deepest cuts in public broadcasting in CBC history. Faced with a massive 108 million dollar reduction in its federal budget

allocation, the CBC announced that eleven television stations across the country, including CBET-TV Windsor, would no longer provide local programming services<sup>30</sup>. Although the federal cuts were to be implemented as of 1 April 1991, the CBC stated that local program production was to cease immediately<sup>31</sup>. According to the CBC, three of the eleven affected stations were to be closed, while the remaining eight, including CBET-TV Windsor, were to be reduced in status and size to what Gérard Veilleux described as "small journalistic bureaus"<sup>32</sup>. For CBET-TV, this meant the eventual elimination of 84 jobs<sup>33</sup>. Only three Windsor journalists would be retained on staff to file local stories for the Toronto regional newscast that was now expected to serve the Windsor area<sup>34</sup>.

Given their frustration and anger over a decision that was taken with little understanding of, or concern for, the communication needs of the citizens of Windsor, residents' reaction was swift and intense. On the night the cuts were announced, more than 300 viewers phoned CBET-TV to voice their support for the station and its local programming<sup>35</sup>. That same evening, mayor John Millson who was in Ottawa when the cuts were being announced, appeared on national CBC television telling Canadians:

We feel isolated enough...We're in kind of an island surrounded by the United States. And the CBC was our only true link, not only to the rest of Canada, but also to local news...It's just devastating for us. And I'll tell you the citizens of Windsor are just outraged and certainly won't stand still for this<sup>36</sup>.

Millson's words rang true when only two days after CBET-TV had gone off the

air with the "ironic network plug: Right where you live, CBC Television, Windsor 9"<sup>37</sup>, a hundred people gathered in Council Chambers to plan the "Save the CBC" campaign.

In the days and weeks following the CBC announcement, Windsor residents' reaction as expressed on local radio and in the local newspaper, *The Windsor Star*, left little doubt that they felt as though they had been politically and culturally disenfranchised. By December 11, the local newspaper, *The Windsor Star*, was brimming with letters to the editor denouncing the cuts and expressing fear over the repercussions of the CBC's decision. Many residents voiced their disbelief that Windsor, with a population of 250,000, could have its one and only local television artery so brutally severed<sup>38</sup>. Others were quick to point out that major cities such as Calgary and Saskatoon which had been dealt a similar blow by the CBC still benefited from two large private stations providing local news<sup>39</sup>. Some also noted with irony that while they could tune into any one of ten local American newscasts, they no longer had a television window on their own community<sup>40</sup>.

In advancing these arguments, Windsor residents readily acknowledged that the permeability of the Windsor-Detroit border insofar as the flow of information and culture is concerned had long been a daily reality. They vehemently argued, however, that the elimination of local CBC news stripped the city of what then mayor John Millson described as "its umbrella of protection against cultural acid rain"<sup>41</sup>. For example, Windsor resident Barbara

Andrew wrote:

As I prepare dinner, I am crying...I am listening to CBC Radio and the story of the death of Windsor CBET-TV...As a border city already closely linked to the U.S., we have effectively been removed from our linking with Canada by these cuts<sup>42</sup>.

Similarly, Patricia Ouellette Bondy wrote: "It's like having my lifeline cut off, and I suddenly feel that I am struggling for breath. Claustrophobia looms and I sense this huge hand reaching out over the [Detroit] river. I'm not sure whether it will crush me or scoop me up. Neither is a pleasant prospect"<sup>43</sup>. And finally, A. Arthur Smith, expressing many Windsor residents' frustration with both the CBC and the federal government wrote: "Let those merchants and businesses that object to the goods and services tax collect it -- but turn it over to our new station instead of remitting it to Ottawa"<sup>44</sup>. Notably, the only Windsor residents to publicly express a lack of sympathy for CBET's predicament were a few disgruntled union workers who, in letters to the editor published in *The Windsor Star*, noted with irony that *The Windsor Star* paid great attention when their journalistic colleagues' livelihood was at stake, but not when other union workers' jobs were on the chopping block<sup>45</sup>.

If anyone doubted that the majority of Windsor residents were fundamentally opposed to the CBC's decision, these doubts quickly dissipated after the city organized a protest rally on Sunday, 16 December 1990. This rally which some CBC Windsor journalists feared might yield a meagre manifestation of support<sup>46</sup> boasted the "largest turnout ever for a



demonstration in the city"<sup>47</sup>. By far the most vocal and visual expression of civic discontent the city had ever witnessed, this rally drew approximately 10,000 concerned residents from all walks of life. Moreover, rather than mark the culmination of Windsor residents' opposition to the loss of CBET-TV programming, this event only signalled the beginning of residents' tireless efforts to restore local television news.

For instance, only a few days later, Windsor MPs presented a petition of fifty-seven thousand Windsor signatures to Parliament demanding the reinstatement of local CBC news. As Windsor MP Steven Langdon told *The Windsor Star*: "I think the government people were amazed. The comments that came as we were presenting were, OK, that's enough"<sup>48</sup>. Later that same evening, the TV Ontario program, "Between the Lines", aired a special about the local reaction to the elimination of CBET-TV programming<sup>49</sup>. This program conveyed the message that Windsor residents were prepared to examine all options to restore what they viewed as a communication entitlement.

By January, Windsor's "Other Options" committee had investigated a variety of ways of providing local news ranging from a CBC employee buy-out of the station, to a strategic alliance with TVO, to private sector participation in the provision of local news. As *The Globe and Mail* reported on January 5, this committee had the support and assistance of Windsor residents from all walks of life including "local accountants [who] offered to conduct a free feasibility study of the station which would be affiliated with the CBC"<sup>50</sup>.

Importantly, however, the city had not given up on the possibility that the CBC itself would restore local programming thereby fulfilling its initial commitment to the citizens of Windsor. Nevertheless, the city recognized that the CBC was unlikely to revoke its decision of its own accord. As a result, on 22 February 1991, the City of Windsor filed a lawsuit against the CBC in the general division of the Ontario Court<sup>51</sup>. The lawsuit was based on the CBC's breach of its CRTC conditions of license to own and operate the Windsor station which required that it provide 11 hours of local programming each week<sup>52</sup>. To help defray the cost of this court challenge, donation cans were placed in businesses across the city. This loonie campaign raised thousands of dollars towards the cost of the court challenge<sup>53</sup>. Although this lawsuit was eventually dismissed by a federal judge who ruled that "CBC programming is not a court matter"<sup>54</sup>, the "Save the CBC" committee continued its fight to restore local programming.

On 20 March 1991, only a week before the court ruling, Mayor John Millson gave a stellar performance before the CRTC during the Commission's hearings into the CBC actions. As Wayne Skene notes in Fade to Black: A Requiem for the CBC:

The tone of everyone's position seemed to change with Millson's presentation. It was humorous, convincing and made it hard for anyone who was paying attention not to try to think of ways to help the city out of its unique predicament"<sup>55</sup>.

Almost two years later CBC president Gérard Veilleux would admit of having

"...pleaded with the CRTC to tell me to open it [the Windsor station]. In my closing statement at the CRTC, I told the CRTC, look help us, tell us. Tell me. I'll do it"<sup>56</sup>.

At the time, however, Veilleux lacked the political will to reverse the Corporation's earlier decision with regards to the Windsor closure. Both the CBC and the CRTC feared that if they assumed responsibility for the reinstatement of local programming in Windsor, other cities would insist that the broadcaster or the Commission take a similar stance with regards to the provision of local news in their cities as well<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, despite Veilleux's not-so-subtle pleas to the Commission, the CRTC did not order the CBC to return to Windsor. This, also despite the fact that, as the Honourable Herb Gray noted in his 28 February 1991 brief to the Commission, the CRTC had a precedent created by its CRTC 88-485 decision of August 2, 1988 on which to base its refusal to allow the CBC to remove local programming from CBET-TV<sup>58</sup>. Yet rather than base its judgement on this precedent, the CRTC simply urged the CBC to assume its responsibilities and denied it the opportunity to reap the benefits of local advertising if no local programming was to be provided to the city<sup>59</sup>.

This CRTC edict delivered June 1991 marked a turning point in Windsor's long and concerted effort to restore local programming. As Jane Boyd, assistant to the Mayor noted, the fight to counter the elimination of local CBC news "had consumed our office for at least six months"<sup>60</sup>. As a result,

both the city and the public broadcaster would eventually turn their attention to other pressing matters. However, this dispute between the CBC and the citizens of Windsor was by no means settled.

Unable to contest the CBC's actions in the courts or by means of the regulatory body, Windsor residents continued to manifest their anger and frustration with the CBC by shunning both regional and national CBC programming. As Wayne Skene reports:

...CBC's share of the Windsor supper hour period audience dropped a whopping sixty-three per cent between the fall of 1990 and the spring of 1991...CBC's share of television viewing overall in Windsor plummeted to a mere seven per cent by the fall of 1991 - compared to fifty-six per cent for Windsorites watching U.S. stations. If there is any doubt that Windsor was punishing the CBC network for bailing out of local television news, that minuscule seven per cent figure was less than one-half the audience the original CBC station, CKLW-TV received in 1974<sup>61</sup>.

Windsor residents' efforts to exert audience pressure on the CBC to reverse its decision was supplemented by political pressure exercised by the mayor's office. As Jane Boyd recalls, "We used to call Veilleux all the time...We must have been driving him crazy, but we never let up"<sup>62</sup>.

The city also continued to investigate the possibility of other sources of local news. It was thought that if a private broadcaster could provide a viable news program to the city, that this move might stimulate competition and encourage the CBC to re-enter the local market<sup>63</sup>. The city's efforts to encourage a private broadcaster to enter the Windsor market were rewarded in October 1993 when Baton began providing 2 1/2 hours of local news per

week<sup>64</sup>. The city welcomed this private initiative yet given the fact that this news program was only available to those households with cable, Windsor residents and politicians did not view Baton's presence, in and of itself, as an acceptable solution to the local CBC blackout<sup>65</sup>.

Nevertheless, it was not until 11 March 1994, after more than three years of sustained political and public pressure, that the CBC formally announced that CBET local news would be reinstated. Dubbing the initiative "The Windsor experiment", then CBC vice-president Ted Kotcheff explained that the Windsor station would become a test centre for the latest in broadcast technology, video journalism and union-management relations<sup>66</sup>. Ironically, the community that for more than three years had not warranted a local CBC newscast was suddenly to become a national showcase. On 4 October 1994, "with a simple, 'good evening, CBC local news has returned'", the slate was wiped clean on nearly four years of CBC television indifference towards Windsor<sup>67</sup>. In keeping with its lack of accountability during this period, the CBC never satisfactorily explained to the Other Options Committee why it had refused all of the city's innovative proposals to restore local programming in 1991. Moreover, having seemingly learned little from what would become known as "the Windsor fiasco", CBC officials insisted that their decision to reinstate local news was by no means influenced by the concerted public and political pressure exerted by Windsor residents during the three year hiatus in local programming<sup>68</sup>.

CBET-TV's fate: a microcosm of the problems which plague public broadcasting

Now that I have documented the history of both the Windsor station and the fight against the elimination of local CBC news, many questions need to be addressed. For instance, how are the events surrounding the elimination of local CBC Windsor programming linked to the problematic assumptions underlying conceptions of both public broadcasting and the public sphere? Would the outcome of this dispute between the citizens of Windsor and the CBC have been different if the public broadcaster had been motivated by the ideal of democratic communication rather than the ideal of fiscal efficiency or centralized control? How did the CBC's decision affect processes of individual and group identity formation in Windsor? Did Windsor residents suffer from self-alienation in the absence of local television news?

Moreover, were Windsor residents forced to subsume their interests and needs to national public broadcasting goals and goods? In other words, were Windsor residents relegated to a rhetoric of disincorporation as a result of the CBC's approach to conflict resolution? What roles were the citizens of Windsor invited to play in initial and subsequent programming and administrative decision-making processes? Did the traditional barriers of media professionalism and corporate autonomy create obstacles to participatory democracy in the resolution of this public controversy? Finally, what does this case study teach us about the ideal of democratic communication and its role in revitalizing the public sphere? In attempting to answer these questions, I will

briefly recount the key arguments made in chapters 3-5 and then indicate how these arguments apply to the Windsor case study.

In Chapter 3, I argued that contrary to the dominant policy rhetoric, the free reign of market-driven broadcasting services would not result in complex levels of freedom and equality insofar as television viewing options were concerned. In addition, I suggested that the advent of a multi-channel universe need not necessarily fragment the audience and radically undermine the effectiveness of broadcasting as a means of societal integration. These often-voiced disaster scenarios would only be inevitable if the free market ideals of efficiency and control were allowed to supersede irrevocably the ideal of democratic communication implicit in the public broadcasting project. As I explained, the market ideals of efficiency and control are based on risk minimization strategies which limit the variety of available programming to commercially viable products.

In contrast, broadcasting which is fuelled by the ideal of democratic communication attempts to extend citizens' local, regional, national and international sensibilities. Such broadcasting acknowledges that these territorial, cultural and social sensibilities cannot be dictated from either the centre or the regions. Rather, they must emanate from, and reverberate through, as many different types and levels of media as possible. Most importantly, broadcasting based on the ideal of democratic communication recognizes the crucial role that its programming plays in the definition and

enactment of social identities and group opinion formation. Such broadcasting increases citizens' freedom and equality by providing both access points and integrative discursive arenas in which the processes of self-realization and democratic decision-making can flourish.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the faulty conflation of nationalist goals with those of "the public" and of consumer capitalist goals with those of "the audience" has continuously undermined the realization of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in the public broadcasting project. As I explained, these conflations circumvent meaningful debate by sidelining the majority of the public and all but negating the audience. Given the strict insistence on the separation of public and private interests and identities that are implicit in these conflations, a rhetoric of disincorporation thus becomes a prerequisite for entry into public broadcasting decision-making. This rhetoric, together with the perceived necessity to subsume private interests and identities to public goals and goods, leads to self-alienation and self-deception in dominant and minority groups alike. Crucially, these conflations and their accompanying rhetoric deny all deliberants the opportunity to determine for themselves - in cohort with other members of the various discursive communities to which they belong - how their individual and group interests and identities connect with or undercut those traditionally assumed to be representative of the national good.



I contended, therefore, that if the ideal of democratic communication is to be realized, the concept, role and power traditionally attributed to "the public" and "the audience" respectively must be fundamentally revised. Only once these discursive entities are posited as different, yet countersecting forces, can they be transformed from rhetorical tools which promote self-alienation and self-deception into rhetorical tools which foster the communicative ethics required to realize the ideal of democratic communication. This communicative ethics rests on the respect and integration of four ethical principles, namely, pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability.

In Chapter 5, I argued that mutual accountability and its accompanying emphasis on participatory democracy, remains the linchpin of the communicative ethics required to realize the ideal of democratic communication. However, as I explained, the widespread recognition and endorsement of mutual accountability has been severely hampered by public broadcasters' insistence on maintaining a sharp separation between public broadcasting and the State. Rather than protecting citizens' communicative freedom, public broadcasters' insistence on an arm's length stance from the State, coupled with notions of corporate autonomy and media professionalism, have created significant impediments to meaningful public participation in public broadcasting programming and decision-making. This exclusion of the public from decision-making processes is particularly problematic given the fact that

neither the State nor the market can independently assume this responsibility because both these forces, when allowed to act unhampered, serve to reinforce the status quo and to naturalize knowledge-brokers' biases with regards to programming and administrative decisions.

I thus argued that despite the difficulties and risks associated with democratic initiatives, public broadcasters must break down the barriers to mutual accountability and participatory democracy in order to realize the ideal of democratic communication. However, in attempting both to democratize the media and to use the media as an instrument for the democratization of society, public broadcasters must not fall prey to the fallacies implicit in theories of traditional representative democracy or direct democracy. Rather, public broadcasters' attempts to promote participatory democracy must be premised on new forms of self-management and intra-public coordination which recognize the dynamic combination of autonomy, trust and mutual accountability required to achieve the ideal of democratic communication. Such strategies of participatory democracy acknowledge that there are many facets to decision-making, not all of which require participants to be the final authors of decisions in order to be effective and influential partners in the process.

#### Preserving key access points to discursive interaction

One can easily see how the clash between the market-driven ideal of efficiency and the public broadcasting ideal of democratic communication discussed in Chapter 3 played itself out in Windsor in relation to CBET-TV,

Channel 9. Consider for a moment the CBC's decision to eliminate local Windsor programming solely from a free market perspective. From this point of view, the public broadcaster's decision makes sound economic sense. Operating a full-fledged television station in Windsor in the 1990s is a costly proposition. In fact, one is tempted to conclude that it is a nonviable commercial prospect for most private broadcasters. Given the city's proximity to the United States, Windsor is considered part of the American market where program purchasing is concerned. As NABET, local 75, Windsor, noted in its brief of 18 March 1991 to the CRTC, "Detroit and surrounding areas [including Windsor] comprise the fifth largest television market in the United States, approximately 5,000,000 people"<sup>69</sup>. This logic leads to a troublesome anomaly for broadcasters who would like to turn a quick profit: the purchase price of a U.S. program destined for distribution in the Windsor market is often double that of the price for the Canadian market as a whole. To supply CBET-TV Windsor with a substantial percentage of American programming - a practice long used by private broadcasters because it is cheaper to buy American programs than to produce Canadian ones - is thus economically infeasible<sup>70</sup>.

Despite this major programming constraint, CBET-TV did generate significant advertising revenues that the CBC would be loathe to lose in the event of a station closure. The ideal of efficiency thus dictated that the CBC adopt a strategy that would enable it to continue reaping the benefits of local

advertising while ridding itself of the burden to produce costly local programming. Yet rather than admit that the ideal of efficiency was its guiding goal, the CBC, in defending its decision before the CRTC, argued that it was in the "public interest" to continue to sell advertising in Windsor<sup>71</sup>. Not surprisingly, the CBC's sudden concern for the public interest when advertising dollars were at stake did not sit well with the residents of Windsor. As NABET, local 75, Windsor would argue in its CRTC brief of 18 March 1991:

Let's be frank, the Corporation showed absolutely no concern for the public interest of the tri-county area residents, when it decided to close down CBET but now they hide behind the skirt of public interest in an attempt to get the Commission to authorize it's (sic) violating of the local advertising policy<sup>72</sup>.

The CBC's attempt to protect its advertising dollars by continuing to provide some form of public service to the Windsor area lead to the redesignation of CBET-TV as a local journalistic bureau and the promotion of the hastily conceived concept of regional programming. According to this new programming formula devised by the CBC, regional news programming in each province would replace local news in all cities other than provincial capitals<sup>73</sup>.

As might have been expected, Windsor residents were quick to denounce this new programming format as a poorly masked attempt to preserve the CBC's core at the expense of what the public broadcaster obviously deemed a disposable periphery. As Mayor John Millson noted in his presentation before the CRTC, the regional concept was "...a programming disaster created to solve an administrative problem and not a response to viewers' needs or

interests"<sup>74</sup>. Hugh Edmonds concurred arguing: "The regional policy grew out of commercial necessity. The whole thing was a farce but no one sat down and said what does this all mean?"<sup>75</sup>. In fact, CBC President Gérard Veilleux *did* explain what regional programming meant during his intervention before the CRTC on 19 March 1991. In justifying the elimination of local programming, Veilleux contended that the regional plan was designed "to replace a mirror with a window so Canadians would spend less time looking at and talking to themselves and more time looking at and talking to each other"<sup>76</sup>. However, in making this statement, Veilleux revealed his fundamental lack of understanding of the role of public broadcasting as a catalyst for democratic communication in the public sphere.

Had Veilleux and the CBC board of directors considered the CBC's options and responsibilities from the perspective of the ideal of democratic communication, they would have certainly come to a different conclusion. Immersed in the rhetoric of efficiency and control, CBC administrators were convinced, as senior vice-president Michael McEwen noted in a letter to one Windsor resident, that "...the severe measures we took were both unavoidable and the least disruptive in the circumstances"<sup>77</sup>. The question, however, is disruptive to whom? This decision may well have been presumed to be the least disruptive to the efficiency of the Corporation, yet it was clearly not the least disruptive to the processes of discursive exchange in which the citizens of Windsor were/are engaged. Clearly, in making this decision, the CBC failed

to account for the fact that public broadcasting does not function solely, or even primarily, as a discursive arena in which to build national consensus or a unified national consciousness, but rather as a space in which citizens can continuously create and recreate their individual and group identities and align and realign their individual and group interests. The need for such a discursive space is particularly acute in Windsor given the fact that it is both geographically isolated from the rest of Canada and economically and culturally attached to Detroit.

Ironically, the citizens of Windsor intuitively sensed what those professionals entrusted with the administration and programming of public broadcasting failed or refused to see. Windsor residents, to their credit, understood that the CBC's discursive transaction in eliminating local Windsor news involved both a redistribution of communication rights and a decision as to who would be exposed to a coercive discursive force - a decision that was clearly not in their favour. As a result, they argued, in every day language, that the emancipatory potential of CBET-TV local news resided in its simultaneous ability to contribute to Windsor residents' formation of discursive opinions and their enactment of social identities. CBET-TV thus functioned as what Nancy Fraser describes as a "space of withdrawal and regroupment"<sup>78</sup> and as "a training ground for agitational activities directed towards wider publics which partially offset, though not wholly eradicated, the unjust participatory privilege enjoyed by members of dominant groups"<sup>79</sup>, in this case, Detroit and Toronto.

Windsor residents also understood that this was not a dialogical phase that they had somehow outgrown after 15 years of CBET-TV local newscasts, but an ongoing and essential communicative process. Unlike those entrusted with the administration of national public broadcasting:

...irate citizens of Windsor knew from living across the Detroit River... and trying day in, day out to retain something resembling a Canadian identity that the absence of local television news would make it more difficult to find out what was going on in their community and perhaps more importantly how to define themselves culturally<sup>80</sup>.

In taking this stance, Windsor residents were not succumbing to an irrational fear of the intermingling of Canadian and American culture. For the most part, they welcomed the diversity that their border culture afforded, but only insofar as they could be dialogical partners in the process, not relegated to becoming recipients of what would quickly become tedious monologues from Detroit and Toronto.

Moreover, despite inflammatory rhetoric from community leaders such as Gary Parent, president of the Windsor and District Labour Council, who told *The Windsor Star* "Windsor is an island now. They've taken our culture away"<sup>81</sup>, Windsor residents were not so naive as to assume that local television news could provide a ready-made Canadian identity. They did, however, seem to share MP Howard McCurdy's belief that the discursive contestation with the CBC in which the community was engaged was at least in part "a fight to be Canadian"<sup>82</sup>. In other words, the community's actions and reactions seem to suggest that they believed, as does Arthur Siegal, that

while "broadcasting cannot create identity...it can facilitate identity formation, the cultural dimension of unity"<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, as Windsor residents' media consumption habits in the absence of CBET-TV news aptly demonstrate, the processes of identity and group opinion formation do not come to a halt as a result of the elimination of one of the citizens' key access points to integrative arenas of discursive interaction. As University of Windsor researcher Margaret Young discovered, in the absence of local television news, Windsor residents' "hunger for televised local news is the same - it is just being met by distant indifferent sources"<sup>84</sup>.

Young's findings thus suggest that if national public broadcasters are unable or unwilling to provide access points to their abstract systems of national networks, the affected communities must move quickly to form alliances with those public and private media sources that can fulfil these needs. As the City of Windsor argued in a 19 March 1993 CRTC intervention: "There must be leeway for the community to maintain the integrity of truly local broadcast by retransmitting over CBC airwaves other local news programs in the event that the CBC cannot fulfil its commitment"<sup>85</sup>. Otherwise, citizens will seek whatever mechanisms are available to counteract the disembedding processes implicit in their recourse to abstract systems such as national public broadcasting. In Windsor's case, citizens' irrefutable need for what Tosten Hagerstand describes as "a double anchoring in time and place"<sup>86</sup> led more than half of Windsor residents to seek their local information not from Windsor



radio or newspaper reports, but rather from Detroit television news<sup>87</sup>.

Windsor residents' recourse to American television stations for local information is perhaps predictable given the fact that as of 1986:

American stations have taken up 75% of Windsor's television dial, a figure that closely matches audience share. By the Corp's own figures presented to the Commission in 1986, the % of audience share in Windsor from 6:00 am to 2:00 am was broken down to the following: CBET 13%; CTV 3%; U.S. stations 76%; others/VCRs 8%. Windsor's 75% figure for U.S. stations dwarfs all other cities compared to Vancouver with 38% which is the next highest percentage<sup>88</sup>.

What is surprising, however, is that Windsor residents sought local news primarily from Detroit stations despite the fact that these stations repeatedly sensationalized or marginalized Windsor daily life. As Percy Hatfield, a veteran CBET-TV reporter and one of the remaining journalists to file stories for the Toronto regional newscast noted: "Detroit didn't do anything...unless there was a sensational story such as the case of the young man accused of dumping his infant child in the river and then they were all over it"<sup>89</sup>. County warden Greg Stewart concurred with Hatfield's evaluation stating: "The American media only include Canadian content if it involves murders, rapes or something being blown up"<sup>90</sup>. Chief of staff Jane Boyd also reached a similar conclusion: "We could not convince them to cover our stories. When they did cover Windsor stories, such as the casino opening, they responded to their needs, not Windsor's needs"<sup>91</sup>.

Arguably, however, Windsor residents in search of local television news were caught between a rock and a hard place as the Toronto regional newscast did not fair any better in responding to Windsor's news needs. As Percy Hatfield noted, "They weren't convinced that adding regional content would enhance their audience ratings".<sup>92</sup> As a result, stories from Windsor were often dropped at the last minute, leaving Windsor journalists the unpleasant task of explaining to local interviewees why they would not appear, once again, on the evening news. Yet the incident that convinced Hatfield and the remaining Windsor reporters that they had to "stake out the emotional turf to convince Toronto that it had to listen to what Windsor had to say"<sup>93</sup>, was the regional newscast's coverage of the death of Bert Weeks, one of Windsor's most popular former mayors. A first story announcing Weeks' death aired on the regional newscast. However, when Hatfield tried to get even one of the many follow-up stories that CBET-TV would have done about Weeks on the air, he was told "it won't sing in Toronto".<sup>94</sup> In the absence of CBET-TV local news, incidents such as this one multiplied, leaving Windsor residents with the distinct impression that the Toronto regional news staff had neither knowledge of, nor interest in, the people and events which shaped the daily lives of the Windsor community<sup>95</sup>.

While there is a strong consensus that Windsor daily life was largely ignored in the newscasts emanating from Detroit and Toronto, these stations should not be unduly criticized for failing to come to the aid of a community

which had lost its looking glass. Clearly, the citizens of Toronto also suffered discursively from the Toronto news team's attempt to conform to a bureaucratic and ill-conceived concept of regional news. As Bruce Taylor, CBET Windsor station manager explained: "It was difficult for a show that had worked obsessively hard to be a Toronto station to adapt to the regional concept"<sup>96</sup>. In fact, in attempting to meet simultaneously the local news needs of both Toronto and Windsor, the Toronto news team suffered from abysmal ratings across the region. These ratings led to internal CBC memos calling for the elimination of all Windsor news items from the regional newscast<sup>97</sup>. For their part, private stations in Detroit for whom audience ratings and profits are the bottom line could hardly be expected to assume an altruistic role in Windsor, a role that even the national Canadian public broadcaster decided it was unable to fulfil.

What the deficient coverage of Windsor events and community life in the absence of CBET-TV news does suggest, however, is that the CBC should not only have been more aware of, but also more concerned about, the discursive void that would be created by the elimination of CBET-TV local news. Furthermore, CBC administrators should have understood that the CBC would be unable to fulfil its role as an integrative arena of discursive interaction at the regional and national levels if the communities it wished to regroup were deprived of their local access points to regional or national dialogues. As the Honourable Herb Gray noted in his brief to the CRTC: "Relying on the national

and regional CBC broadcasts emanating from Toronto, although they may carry some Windsor area items, from time to time from a Windsor bureau, not only distorts the character of the Windsor-Essex area but of Canada generally<sup>98</sup>.

### Overcoming self-alienation and self-deception

The CBC's decision to eliminate local television programming in Windsor was thus fundamentally unacceptable because it lead to the misrecognition of Windsor residents both by members of their own community and by the nation at large. As Charles Taylor explains in Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition:

...our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves<sup>99</sup>.

It is in this sense that the decision to eliminate Windsor residents' only local television access point to integrative arenas of discursive interaction undermined these residents' processes of self-identification and group opinion formation. The elimination of CBET-TV news could also be said to have contributed to self-alienation and self-deception among Windsor residents because they had no public televisual venue in which they could define and express their personal and collective interests and identities. Clearly, in both Detroit or Toronto newscasts Windsor residents' interests and identities were arbitrarily and artificially excluded from coverage.

As a result, if Windsor residents wanted to remain tuned in to the daily happenings of their local community, they had to little choice but to alter their media consumption habits. Clearly, some Windsor residents rediscovered or depended more heavily upon other local Canadian media access points such as CBC radio and *The Windsor Star*. Significantly, however, at least 50 per cent of Windsor residents arbitrarily set aside and denied the particularities of their Windsor identity and interests choosing to view Detroit newscasts as a makeshift access point to local news and events<sup>100</sup>. This decision is easily understood given the fact that the most readily available, and by far the most numerous, local television access points to discursive interaction are of American origin. This reality, combined with the fact that television remains for most Canadians the preferred and primary source of mediated information, explains in part Windsor residents' consumption habits in the wake of CBET-TV's demise. However, the decision to engage in self-deceptive tactics by privileging American television news over other sources of Windsor media information had a deleterious effect on Windsor residents' participation in community life. As Margaret Young observed in a 1992 study, in the absence of CBET-TV news, Windsor residents were increasingly less likely to become socially or politically involved in their "local" community, whether they chose to define it in relation to Windsor, Detroit or Toronto<sup>101</sup>.

Conversely, when CBET-TV news was reinstated, Windsor residents' cultural appetite and civic need for news emanating both from Windsor and

from across the country grew substantially. Only a month after CBET television news returned, the CBC had already recaptured an average audience of 21,000 viewers and the numbers continued to grow<sup>102</sup>. Similarly, CBC regional newscasts that had severely suffered in the absence of local Windsor news, now captured a 20+ share of the adult viewers<sup>103</sup>. These figures support the contention that when citizens have a venue in which to define and enact their interests and identities, they welcome the opportunity to engage in discursive exchanges with their regional and national neighbours. Contrary to Veilleux's assumption, then, local newscasts are not discursive entities that are separatist enclaves in nature. Their role is not to ghettoize citizens by encouraging them to "spend time talking to and looking at themselves"<sup>104</sup>. Insofar as local news producers and their viewers recognize that their programs and the critical publicity which results from them imply a larger public, they are implicitly inclusive. Therefore, the presence of local news such as CBET Windsor neither negates nor ignores the need for an integrative discursive arena such as the CBC national network. In fact, it does just the opposite. It facilitates and fosters such exchanges.

Furthermore, the Windsor case would seem to support the argument that there is a strong correlation between meaningful access to networks of public communication and the revitalization of the public sphere. Deprived of their key access point to the dominant medium of public communication, Windsor residents were relegated, insofar as television is concerned, to a non-public

arena, one which undermined discursive interaction both within the community and across regional lines. Diminished in their ability to communicate publicly via television, Windsor residents clearly suffered from "the tyranny of intimacy"<sup>105</sup> described by Alexander Kluge in an interview with Stuart Liebman:

If I believe that I can make myself understood in a collective, then this is public. If I do not think that I can make what I feel or my experiences understandable to others, than it is intimate. This is the tyranny of intimacy: that I cannot express myself publicly. The public sphere is only as free as the intimate sphere is free and developed<sup>106</sup>.

There is little doubt that Windsor residents were repeatedly thwarted in their concerted attempts to make the reality and concerns of their daily life publicly understood and reflected via newscasts emanating from Detroit or Toronto. This frustrating predicament clearly diminished Windsor residents' interest and ability to participate in the political and social decision-making activities of their local community.

Yet rather than succumb to the privatization of this essential element of their public arena of discursive interaction, Windsor residents developed what Albert Hirschman describes as "a horizontal voice"<sup>107</sup>. This entails exercising one's civic right "to address others, to call forth some sort of 'we', to make manifest a political identity"<sup>108</sup> in order to fight a measure which affects all citizens directly and profoundly. In this case, Windsor residents overcame the cultural, economic, political and social differences which may have divided

them on other issues to "forge a group political identity based on their shared experiences [of being]...condemned to silence"<sup>109</sup> insofar as local television access was concerned. As Jane Boyd, Windsor mayor's chief of staff, noted, in all her years of living and working in Windsor she had "...never seen a response like it. There was a highly political element to it...but the people didn't politicize it...This crossed all the lines"<sup>110</sup>.

Windsor residents' ability to call forth this horizontal voice was particularly crucial given the CBC's attempt to predetermine the common good and to naturalize the corporation's centralist interests. In announcing and defending the cuts which lead to the elimination of local Windsor news, the CBC repeatedly insisted that these measures were essential to preserve the national network, a system that was readily equated with the national good. As Hugh Edmonds explains: "There was a repeated suggestion that they [Windsor residents] were being selfish...that they didn't understand the CBC's position"<sup>111</sup>.

However, given the newfound strength of their collective voice, Windsor residents refused to have their interests and needs subsumed to national goods and interests that had been determined by the CBC without their input. As the City of Windsor would note in a subsequent brief to the CRTC:

Windsor laments insinuations that its protests are motivated by a lack of understanding of the need to cut back some CBC programming to preserve the integrity of the whole...[Windsor refutes this line of reasoning arguing that] we are protesting because much of what has happened is grossly unjust, ineffective and damaging to the Corporation, damaging to the Commission and damaging to the citizens of Windsor and area<sup>112</sup>.



Significantly, in refusing to be drawn into the logic of abstraction that the subjugation of their individual and group interests to those of the collective would require, Windsor residents did not only insist on their right to have private interests considered in a public debate. They also forcefully contested the CBC's definition and delimitation of national goals and goods. As noted above, they argued the Corporation's decisions were not only *not* in the best interests of Windsor residents, but were also fundamentally detrimental to both the national public broadcaster and its central regulatory agency.

In fact, during the three year hiatus of local public broadcasting in Windsor, the city methodically undermined several of the Corporation's traditional definitions of public broadcasting goals and goods. For instance, in a 1992 CRTC brief, the city contested the Corporation's arbitrary definition of diversity, arguing "our strength is in our diversity...[but] our diversity is reflected by our communities - not artificially imposed regions"<sup>113</sup>. The city also questioned the CBC's belief that it could forego its responsibility to provide intrinsic analysis of Windsor's community life to its residents. As the city contended in a 1993 CRTC brief: "...it should be considered the *right* of citizens to have the use of television as a means to access news of their community"<sup>114</sup>. In lamenting the paucity of diversity and intrinsic analysis in their television viewing options, the city also repeatedly underlined the need for the market and the State to act as countersecting forces in the provision of broadcasting services. As the city explained, Windsor's television reality in the

absence of CBET-TV news is a distressing warning of what can happen when "...citizens are overwhelmed by 'choices' which do not reflect their reality and are beyond the control of even their national governments"<sup>115</sup>.

In making these interventions, the city also reasserted its citizens' communicative entitlement to access the key discursive arenas which would facilitate and foster their involvement as active and informed deliberants in public debate. Communications professor Stan Cunningham articulated well the city's concern that community life and involvement would suffer substantially as a result of the CBC's measure. As he noted in a *Windsor Star* opinion piece a few days after the elimination of local news was announced:

...'communication' and 'community' are more than just kinship words: they co-signify some deep-structured dependencies. When the means and quality of communication are reduced either at the level of city, country or nation, the spirit and the integrity of those communities suffer in palpable ways. The closing down of Windsor CBET-TV by reducing the quality and extent of public discourse takes away from our community that which is its just due<sup>116</sup>.

As Cunningham alludes, the CBC's decision did not simply eliminate local television news, it also eliminated a key mechanism whereby Windsor residents' were able to simultaneously sense the immediacies of their community life and transcend that reality in order to recognize and respond to the needs and interests of other Canadian communities. The CBC's decision thus weakened Windsor residents' ability to engage in dialogue both within and across community lines and the public broadcaster's ability to generate the

communicative ethics required to realize its own ideal of democratic communication.

Insisting on a mutually accountable relationship

Yet of all the reasons that the CBC's actions were so vehemently contested by the citizens of Windsor, the element of CBC's credibility that was the most repeatedly and profoundly undermined was the CBC's sense of accountability. Notably, the type of accountability Windsor residents expected was not based exclusively or even predominantly on the public broadcaster's responsibility to citizens and citizens' right to force the public broadcaster to comply. Nor was it accountability that limited Windsor residents' involvement in decision-making processes to the exercise of negative freedom. As Professor Trevor Price of the University of Windsor would argue in a letter to Mayor John Millson dated the day the cuts were announced:

The economic viability of this community is strongly related to the vitality of communication which serves us and emphasizes our community image. We cannot simply be a tributary to Toronto and all that means in overgrown apoplexy. Channel 9 passed our messages to the wider network; from now on the traffic will be one way - top down toward us. The only way we can make sure we are not at the mercy of distant élites making decisions for regions they neither know nor care about, is to take charge of our destiny with our own locally owned and operated station<sup>117</sup>.

Mayor John Millson concurred with Price's assessment and on 4 January 1991, in a letter penned by the co-chairpersons of the Other Options Committee, declared to CBC Chairman Patrick Watson and CBC President Gérard Veilleux

that:

If the national public broadcaster is not able to continue to serve our community with local programming, it is incumbent on us in the interests of Windsor and the surrounding community to examine the feasibility of our own public broadcaster working in harmony with the CBC to continue to provide a competitive public broadcasting service"<sup>118</sup>.

These statements indicate that while the City of Windsor would obviously attempt to influence public opinion in its favour, those fighting for the restoration of local programming refused to be limited to mere opinion-forming roles.

Rather, Windsor residents' response to the elimination of local programming was to emphasize mutual accountability, that is to say, accountability fuelled by citizens' recognition and acceptance of both their role, and that of the public broadcaster, in creating and sustaining arenas of discursive interaction. As discussed in chapter 5, such accountability depends on both citizens' and the public broadcaster's commitment to participatory democracy. Clearly, Windsor residents were prepared to participate in the process of finding an acceptable solution to their public broadcaster's predicament. As soon as the CBC's decision became public knowledge, Windsor City Council immediately established an Other Options committee to explore innovative, community-based means of providing local Windsor news. Remarkably, what most of the proposed options had in common was their ability to transcend the public/private and citizen/audience dichotomies that

have long plagued Canadian public broadcasting in order to empower local residents and involve them more directly and proactively in the administration and programming of local news.

For instance, in considering available options, the City of Windsor did not insist that the CBC independently resume all financial and administrative responsibilities for the Windsor station. In fact, the city repeatedly indicated its willingness to assist in the financing and operation of the station<sup>119</sup>. Similarly, seventy-five per cent of the Channel 9 staff, despite the callous way in which they had been informed by the corporation of the cuts<sup>120</sup>, were prepared to invest their own time and money to keep their jobs and preserve what they recognized as a vital service operational. The employee proposal included provisions not only to provide local news, but also to add, by year 3 of the broadcasts, an additional two local programs "The Farm Show" and "The Car Show" to reflect life in the area<sup>121</sup>. The Other Options committee also explored the possibility that a private production company might program the local news on the publicly owned and operated channel. According to Co-chairperson, Howard Pawley, the only option the committee refused to consider was a return to the 1960s style of operation which might result in "another station giving us more of Detroit"<sup>122</sup>.

Another interesting option was detailed by Peter Allies, the former executive news producer who initiated the 90 minute newscast in Windsor. Allies' option went even further than some of the local initiatives in that it

directly implicated Windsor residents as both citizens and audience members in the production process. As Ted Shaw reported, Allies said:

...a community or privately produced news show could operate profitably with a 'core of experienced people' and a group of freelancers. Viewers could be encouraged to submit videotapes of breaking news stories and the actual show could become at remote locations using electronic newsgathering equipment rather than expensive studio gear. 'I think right now...the CBC is desperate to find solutions that are creative, which may vary from policies that have previously been carved in marble'<sup>123</sup>.

However, for either Allies' option or any of the other Windsor initiatives to gain CBC approval, the CBC would have to rethink both its definition and expectations of corporate autonomy and media professionalism.

As might have been anticipated, it was these traditional barriers to more meaningful public participation that eventually undermined Windsor's strategic, well-researched and community-backed initiatives to restore local news. President Gérard Veilleux blamed financial constraints for the CBC's failure to endorse even one of the proposed solutions<sup>124</sup>. However, Hugh Edmonds, who took part in the "Save the CBC" campaign argued that this decision resulted primarily from then Chairman Patrick Watson's belief "...that any form of joint ownership was on the edge of privatization"<sup>125</sup>. Edmonds' allegations are substantiated by the Corporation's response to the serious concerns raised by both the CRTC and the public regarding the absence of local television news in several key centres. In a letter to the CRTC dated November 1991, the CBC indicated, that despite having reviewed a number of proposals, it was "...not

interested in traditional private affiliation relationships, out of concern that this could lead to a 'step by step' privatization of the CBC"<sup>126</sup>. The implication of this logic for affected communities was clear: if the public broadcaster could not provide the service, then no service would be provided. This despite the fact that a public-private or a public-community consortium could potentially be the answer to the CBC's impasse.

Therefore, despite the Other Options committee's strong sense that it was making headway in its negotiations with the CBC, in early March, the committee's proposals hit a brick wall. As the *Globe and Mail* reported on 21 March 1991:

....lobbyists had won support for a special joint venture that promised local financial support to the CBC to restore local programming. But the negotiations were cancelled abruptly earlier this month after the Crown corporation's board of directors decided the CBC should not enter into any agreements with outside organizations to jointly produce news and information programs<sup>127</sup>.

The CBC's decision was conveyed to Mayor John Millson only thirty minutes before a meeting at which both CFPL-TV London and an employee group for CBET-TV Windsor were scheduled to present viable options for the programming of local television news to the Other Options Committee. During this conversation, President Gérard Veilleux informed Millson that "the CBC Board would not enter into any arrangement with any outside group for production of local news given the state of the CBC's financial situation"<sup>128</sup>. For the Other Options committee and all those involved in the "Save the CBC"

campaign, the CBC's refusal to endorse even one of the available options to restore local programming in Windsor because it had the potential to lessen its corporate autonomy or may not have conformed to the corporation's traditional standards of journalistic excellence was fundamentally unacceptable<sup>129</sup>.

The CBC's recourse to the rhetoric of corporate autonomy and media professionalism rang hollow to Windsor residents whose ability to carry on a dialogue via television was clearly not a primary concern for CBC administrators<sup>130</sup>. The only thing that corporate autonomy could mean to the citizens of Windsor was that the CBC had the power and authorization to make whatever decisions it so pleased irrespective of the needs or wishes of the citizens it purported to serve. Similarly, the CBC's concern for maintaining high standards of journalistic excellence and media professionalism was a moot point for Windsor residents who did not even have a local news program against which to set these standards<sup>131</sup>. As a 20 March 1991, *Windsor Star* editorial entitled "CBC's mandate: getting the picture" argued, the citizens of Windsor did not want the public broadcaster to make its long-standing tradition of corporate autonomy and media professionalism its priority. Rather, Windsor residents wanted the CBC to ensure, first and foremost, that all communities have an opportunity to define themselves and see their identities and opinions reflected in local television news. As the editorial stated: "We simply want to cast an eye on what's going on here, in our community, and we want to believe that someone, somewhere has the power to make the CBC follow the



law and give us the service we pay for"<sup>132</sup>.

Importantly, this rhetoric, rooted less in calls for mutual accountability than in rights-based argumentation, would become more common as it became increasingly evident that the CBC would reject every local initiative to restore Windsor news programming to Channel 9. As Jane Boyd noted: "We tried to start reasonable negotiations, but we really got rebuffed"<sup>133</sup>. Clearly, Windsor residents were only prepared to engage in mutually accountable behaviour if the public broadcaster itself was willing to adopt this stance vis-à-vis the communication needs of the citizens of Windsor. However, by July 1991, when most of the mechanisms through which Windsor could call the CBC to account had been exhausted, the *Windsor Star* concluded: "Never before has the CBC's lack of accountability to those who support it been so clearly defined"<sup>134</sup>.

This lack of accountability was exacerbated by Gérard Veilleux's request of 21 November 1991, granted by the CRTC, to delay the Corporation's network license renewal hearings from May 1992 until March 1993. In issuing its June 1991 decision regarding the CBC's failure to continue providing local services, the CRTC had attempted to reassure affected communities by reminding them that these issues and their implications would be fully reviewed at the CBC's license renewal. As a result, as the Honourable Herb Gray, M.P. for Windsor West, argued in a letter to Keith Spicer dated 21 April 1992, the decision to delay the hearings, without any input from the citizens of Windsor

and other affected communities further deprived them of the opportunity to contest the CBC's actions. In light of this aggravated lack of accountability, Gérard Veilleux's reassurances in his letter requesting a stay in the hearings, that the Corporation was giving full consideration to these matters, were rather ironic. As Veilleux indicated in his 29 November 1991 letter to the CRTC:

We have set in motion a wide-ranging process of rethinking such serious issues as...the balance between national and regional programming activities...this process will involve management, staff and Board of Directors of the CBC and will, as well, seek to enlist the kind of outside advice that can help us to maintain a proper perspective on these increasingly important matters<sup>135</sup>.

Unfortunately, however, the Corporation's assurances that it would seek "outside advice" did not extend to those communities and individuals most directly affected by the Corporation's decisions, namely the citizens of Windsor.

What was most frustrating for the citizens of Windsor then, was not only that CBC administrators refused to account for their actions, but also that they had made these decisions without any knowledge of, or input from, the citizens who would be directly affected. As Duanne Plummer, a CBC technician, indicated the day the cuts were announced: "...many CBC employees were angry that the decision to close the Windsor station was made by people who don't know what the station means to the city"<sup>136</sup>. Plummer justified his remarks, noting that: "...since the CBC took over the station in 1975, not one president of the corporation had visited Windsor"<sup>137</sup>. Obviously, one can

only speculate on how the outcome might have been different if the CBC had engaged in participatory democracy and demonstrated faith in citizens' ability to forego a not-in-my-backyard approach to the cuts in favour of innovative solutions that would strengthen the CBC. Arguably, however, had affected communities been consulted before the CBC made its final decision on the best way to implement the federally imposed cuts, Windsor and other communities similarly targeted might have worked with the CBC to address the public broadcaster's financial constraints in concert. One might even imagine a scenario in which citizens, at risk of losing their local television news shows, might have mustered ground swell support to contest the federal government cuts and reaffirm the crucial role that public broadcasting plays in their communities.

What is not in question, however, is that since 1969, when concerned Windsor residents first appeared before the CRTC to proactively request a more public, a more local, and a more Canadian public broadcasting outlet in their area, Windsor residents have sought to develop a mutually accountable relationship with the CBC<sup>138</sup>. In arguing in favour of this strong local, Canadian and public presence in broadcasting, the Committee for Canadian Television, an amalgamation of three Windsor citizens groups concerned with the future of public broadcasting in Windsor insisted that:

...the creative staff, both on and off camera, be one which commits itself to the enrichment of the lives of the Canadian community they serve. This community needs to interact culturally both internally with its own citizens and externally with the world around it<sup>139</sup>.

The relationship with the local CBC broadcaster and its employees which Windsor residents have continuously sought to cultivate has thus been fundamentally based on a joint conversation about the people and events which shape the development of Windsor daily life.

Unfortunately, however, the decision-making model privileged by CBC administrators, particularly in the wake of the 1990 cuts, is a one-way monologue that disempowers citizens not only in Windsor, but in all communities deprived of local CBC television programming. As John McKnight, scholar and community activist argued on the CBC radio series "Community and its Counterfeits":

...modern institutions are machines that redefine human beings, locating us as entities in a system rather than as people in a place. When professionals move in on communities to 'solve a problem' what happens is that people grow weaker, not stronger, for their 'needs' are authoritatively defined by sources outside themselves<sup>140</sup>.

McKnight's description of the role of abstract systems such as the CBC, steeped in a discourse of professionalism and efficiency, tersely summarizes the effect of the CBC's method of handling the elimination of local news in Windsor. Clearly, there could be no mutually accountable relationship in this instance as the CBC refused from the outset to recognize affected communities such as Windsor as discursive partners in the process of defining and redefining the public broadcaster's roles and responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Although the residents of Windsor were ultimately unable to engage their public broadcaster in a mutually accountable relationship, their struggle to restore local CBC news to their community nevertheless highlights meaningful ways in which disenfranchised communities can contribute to the revitalization of the ideal of democratic communication. For instance, the Windsor case study fundamentally puts into question the CBC's traditional emphasis on its role as a purveyor of national news and as a mechanism to solidify a unified, national consciousness. Rather, Windsor residents' reaction to the reality of living without local television news strongly suggests that public broadcasting's crucial contribution lies in its ability to become a mediating instrument of social interaction by extending and reverberating sensibilities through local, regional and national arenas. However, for public broadcasters such as the CBC to play this role, they must successfully integrate themselves, *as both access points and integrative arenas of discursive interaction, in the processes of identity formation and discursive contestation*. In emphasizing democratic communication as its guiding ideal, public broadcasting would thus, as Lawrence Daressa argues:

...foreground the audience rather than its own programming; it would put the audience in the picture not in front of it...Instead of presenting the world to its audience ready-made, it would invite the audience to remake its world...Public television should...deliberately integrate itself into larger social contexts, family, civic organizations, ethnic groups, city, nation. Public television should not stage media events so much as community

events, at times when people should congregate via television to explore shared concerns...in cooperation with various civic organizations<sup>141</sup>.

Windsor residents' concerted attempts to encourage the CBC to adopt this position vis-à-vis those who have entrusted it with the administration and programming of this national good is one of the ways in which communities can help to realize the ideal of democratic communication, and by extension, revitalize the public sphere.

Another way in which communities can contribute to the revitalization of the ideal of democratic communication is by taking advantage of the new imperatives created by the changing media environment to heighten their community's sense of self and empower it to act. Paradoxically, while the temporary cancellation of local CBC news led to Windsor residents' self-effacement and self-alienation on the television screen, their fight to assert their entitlement to local television news also led to the intensification of their self-identity. On the one hand, as Professor Tom Carney argues, "Windsor's lack of its own television station, exacerbated by its close proximity to the U.S. translated into an expressed concern that the city had No identity, that it was unknown to its own residents, not to mention other Canadians".<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, however, the controversy over local news seems to have channelled both the community's interests and residents' sense of their communicative needs. As Percy Hatfield noted: "Windsor from that day began to get a better sense of itself"<sup>143</sup>. Roger Faubert agreed, arguing that:

We've always felt like the adopted children of the CBC. We have always been second fiddles as employees and audiences because we were different...And there is also that mentality that Windsor is an orphan city, always hard done by. However, it is as though we just decided, we're going to take care of ourselves.<sup>144</sup>

The elimination of local news in Windsor thus became the catalyst which motivated Windsor residents to insist on, and secure, their democratic right to be fully contributing partners to the definition of both the goals and goods of public broadcasting.

## END NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. The historical information presented in this and subsequent paragraphs in this section was obtained from a variety of sources including 1) a series of *Windsor Star* articles written by Ted Shaw in March 1991 which detail the history of the station; 2) The City of Windsor's intervention documents (specifically overheads) presented to the CRTC on 21 March 1991; 3) The City of Windsor's intervention with respect to Baton Broadcasting Ltd.'s applications #920622800, 92062300 and 92062440; and 4) an interview with professor emeritus Hugh Edmonds on 7 February 1995 in Windsor. Where appropriate, a second referral to the specific source will be noted.
2. Ted Shaw, "The station log", *The Windsor Star*, 5 December 1990, p. A1.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Other Options Committee document, p. 1.
6. Ted Shaw, op.cit..
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. The Corporation of the City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, Public Hearing 1991-3, 21 March 1991, p. 5.
10. Ibid., p. 5.
11. Edmonds makes this point in op.cit.
12. Corporation of the City of Windsor, Oral Intervention with respect to Baton Broadcasting Corporation, Applications 920622800, 920623600, 9202440. In this intervention, the Corporation refers to CRTC Decision 74-153 which rejected the private operator.
13. Ibid. The Corporation also refers to the CBC's Statement to the Commissioner of 25 May 1974 in Hamilton which contains the CBC promises of very special attention to local programs.



14. CBC application to operate CKLW-TV Windsor, CRTC hearing in Hamilton, Ontario, 6 May 1975.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Roger Faubert, interview with M. Gauthier, 7 February 1995, Windsor, Ontario.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Edmonds, op.cit.
23. Ibid.
24. Marshall Gray was the most senior CBET producer, having begun his career with CBET in 1968. He took his leave from CBET in 1990.
25. Marshall Gray, interview with M. Gauthier, 1 February 1995.
26. Faubert, op.cit.
27. Ted Shaw, "Interest outstrips hope for local news", *The Windsor Star*, 15 March 1991, p. A1.
28. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, March 21, 1991. As documented in a 6 April 1989 CBC press release, this commitment represented an expenditure of \$4,813,000 on CBET programming in the first year of the new license term.
29. CRTC press release, regarding Decision CRTC 89-99, 6 April 1991, pp. 2-3.
30. Ted Shaw. "It's lights out at CBET-TV", *The Windsor Star*, Thursday, 6 December 1990, p. A1.
31. Ibid. For CBET-TV Windsor anchor Eric Sorensen, the immediacy of the decision became readily apparent when, minutes into the CBET evening broadcast on 6 December 1990, he was handed this late breaking story which effectively announced the termination of his employment. As *The*

*Windsor Star* described the scene the next day "Sorensen was reading his own pink slip".

32. Ted Shaw, "It's lights out at CBET-TV", op.cit.
33. Ted Shaw, "CBC axe, as of today is official", *The Windsor Star*, 5 April 1991, p. A1.
34. Ibid.
35. Roseanne Danese, "Millson outlines plan" in *The Windsor Star*, 6 December 1990, p. A4.
36. John Millson, *The Journal*, as quoted in "Help Windsor fight cuts, Millson asks Canadians" in *The Windsor Star*, 6 December 1990, p. A4.
37. Ted Shaw, "It's lights out at CBET-TV", op.cit.
38. This population figure is quoted from the City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, 21 March 1991. According to this same brief, the sentiments expressed on local radio and in the local newspaper were echoed at the protest march organized a week later. As page 3 of the brief notes: "...the gathering was more of a wake than a protest, since so many expressed a deep sense of loss and abandonment for being cast unprotected into the maelstrom of US media. This sentiment was expressed over and over in countless ways and in emotions that ranged from anger to zealotry".
39. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, 21 March 1991.
40. Canadians living in Windsor could potential receive the signal of any one of the ten following American stations: WSBK, WXON, WKBD, WGPR, WADL, WXYZ, WDIV, WTVS, WTVG, WTOL.
41. John Millson as quoted by Wayne Skene in Fade to Black: A Requiem for the CBC. (Douglas and MacIntyre: Vancouver), 1993.
42. Barbara Andrew, letter to the editor, *The Windsor Star*, 11 December 1990.
43. Patricia Ouellette Bondy, letter to the editor, *The Windsor Star*, 11 December 1990.
44. A. Arthur Smith, letter to the editor, *The Windsor Star*, 11 December 1990. Note: Ted Shaw, television critic at *The Windsor Star* confirmed in an interview on the 7 February 1995 that many Windsor residents felt

that the Conservative government was punishing the Essex County area once again for its lack of support in the last federal election.

45. All Windsor interviewees confirmed that they knew of few, if any, Windsor residents who had publicly or privately expressed a lack of concern over the elimination of local television programming.
46. Two CBET journalists noted confidentially that they were pleasantly surprised by the turnout. They knew that Windsor residents were concerned about the fate of the local newscasts, but they thought it unlikely that so many people would spill out into the streets to protest.
47. ----- "We're sick of getting shoved around", *The Windsor Star*, 17 December 1990, p. A1.
48. MP Steven Langdon as quoted by Anne Jarvis in "51,353 signatures supporting CBET", *The Windsor Star*, 20 December 1990, p. A4.
49. ----- "Local impact of CBC cuts topic of TV Ontario program" in *The Windsor Star*, 20 December 1990, p. C11.
50. ----- "Non-profit station an option in Windsor: committee hopes to revive CBC outlets" in *The Globe and Mail* (Clips), 5 January 1990, p. C12.
51. The Toronto lawyer who handled the action was Donald Brown, a lawyer with Blake, Cassels and Grayden.
52. ----- "Windsor takes CBC to court: seeks return of local programming" in *The Globe and Mail*, 22 February 1991, p. C1.
53. Ibid. According to this article, 10,000 loonies had been collected by this date.
54. Sarah Scheli, "CBC fight goes on despite blow" in *The Windsor Star*, 27 March 1991, p. A1.
55. Skene, op.cit., p. 21.
56. Ibid., p. 22.
57. Ibid., p. 22.
58. Herb Gray on p. 4 on his 28 February 1991 letter to Alan Darling, Secretary General of the CRTC, refers to decision CRTC 88-485 of August 2, 1988 which notes: "Should the Corporation be permitted to eliminate entirely its programming originating at CFPR residents of the

northwest part of British Columbia would lose an important and valued service and be deprived of programs which, due to large part of their source, reflect the unique interests, concerns and demands of the many listeners...Accordingly, the Commission denies the CBC's application to amend the broadcasting license of CFPR Prince Rupert by changing the program source to CBYG-FM Prince George. The Commission expects the CBC to continue to originate programming at the Prince Rupert station...". Gray then argues: "The circumstances involving CBET are on all fours with those involved with CFPR Prince Rupert (except that in the latter case a radio station was involved). CBET-TV is the only Canadian tv broadcasting station of any kind located in the Windsor-Essex area. This is unlike the CFPR case since, according to your decision there were private radio stations operating and originating broadcasts within the CFPR listening area. Therefore, Windsor's case is one that is stronger than the CFPR case".

59. ----- "CRTC wants Channel 9 back", *The Windsor Star*, June 28, 1991, p. A1. In its defense, the CRTC argued in an earlier letter to Mr. Ronald Pink that "The CRTC...cannot order the CBC to reopen stations or to rehire staff".
60. Jane Boyd, assistant to the Mayor, interview with M. Gauthier, 7 February 1995.
61. Skene, op.cit., p. 24.
62. Boyd, op.cit.
63. Howard Pawley, Chairman of the Other Options Committee, interview with M. Gauthier, April 5, 1996.
64. "New TV station debuts October 18", *The Windsor Star*, Thursday, 9 September 1993.
65. Boyd, op.cit.
66. "CBC newscast returning soon", *The Windsor Star*, Friday, 11 March 1994.
67. Ted Shaw, "CBET-TV is back", *The Windsor Star*, 4 October 1994.
68. "Return of TV9 news gets high ratings from activists", *The Windsor Star*, Thursday, 19 August 1993.
69. NABET, local 75, Windsor, brief to the CRTC (re: CBC's request to amend the terms and conditions of license), 18 March 1995, p. 5.

70. Edmonds makes this point in op.cit. As far back as 1969, Windsor residents argued before the CRTC that rather than have access to "...some of the more popular U.S. productions, these are 'blackened out' here because of the proximity of Detroit and replaced by 1-1/2 hours of some of the worst old American movies, many of which have run on Channel 9 several times before. In addition, the evening hours (from 6:00 pm on) not occupied by CBC shows are filled with another 2 to 2 1/2 hours of reruns of old American shows. Could not some of this time be used for the best CTV-originated programs which we do not receive?" (1969 CRTC brief, pp.5-6). The above quotation not only indicates Windsor residents' desire to replace mediocre American programming with previously unviewed Canadian fare, but also suggests the extent to which they were already suggesting a public-private broadcasting relationship to better serve the needs of the Windsor residents as citizens and consumers.
71. CBC response to the CRTC, 11 January 1991, p. 62.
72. NABET, local 75, Windsor, brief to the CRTC, 18 March 1991, p. 9.
73. As Edmonds explained, the CBC officials "...felt that if they cut the provincial capitals they would have a big problem politically, if only because of the loss of jobs".
74. Corporation of the City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, 21 March 1991.
75. Edmonds, op.cit.
76. Gérard Veilleux as quoted by Ted Shaw in "Local programming won't be a priority", *The Windsor Star*, 19 March 1991, p. A1.
77. Letter from Michael McEwan, to Frank P. Mascarin, President of the Windsor Art Gallery, 28 December 1990, p. 2.
78. Nancy Fraser uses these words to explain the role of counter-public spheres in "Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy" in *Social Text*, Vol. 25-26, 1990, p. 69.
79. Ibid., p. 69.
80. Skene, op.cit., pp. 11-12.
81. Gary Parent as quoted by Roseanne Danese, op.cit.

82. Windsor St. Clair MP Howard McCurdy as quoted by Ted Shaw in "Millson asks for adjudicator to probe options for Channel 9" in *The Windsor Star*, 20 March 1991.
83. Arthur Siegel, Beyond the Printed Word: The Evolution of Canada's Broadcast News Heritage. Lohead, Richard. (ed.) (Quarry Press: Kingston), 1991, p. 260.
84. Margaret Young, CRTC Oral Intervention, 19 March 1993, p. 5.
85. City of Windsor, CRTC intervention, 19 March 1993, p. 6.
86. Tosten Hagerstrand, "Decentralizing and Radio Broadcasting: On the 'Possibility Space' of a Communication Technology", in *European Journal of Communication* Vol. 1(1), 1986, p. 21.
87. Young, op.cit., p. 3. This trend affected all viewing, including the search for information as banal, but as essential, as weather advisories. As a survey of Windsor residents' main sources of weather information conducted by Marty G. Burnett of Environment Canada between August 1990 and January 1991 indicated, Channel 9 lost 31% of weather watchers over this period while the American stations gained 19% of the audience shared. Channel 9 fell from 49% of all available viewers to a meagre 18% who continued to seek weather information from the regional CBC newscast.
88. NABET, local 75, Windsor, CRTC brief, 18 March 1991, p. 4.
89. Percy Hatfield, interview with M. Gauthier, 7 February 1995.
90. Greg Stewart as quoted by Lee Palser in "'Team Windsor' gears up to fight CBC cuts", *The Windsor Star*, 8 December 1990, p. A1.
91. Boyd, op.cit.
92. Hatfield, op.cit.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid. As Hatfield explained, had there been local CBET news in Windsor, the station would have likely had a series of reports discussing Weeks' contribution to the city of Windsor's development.
95. A *Windsor Star* article entitled "Live, Another Windsor Snub" by Lauren Moore documents two further incidents, one in February 1992 "...when 19 Windsor panellists were told to be ready to talk about the country's

economic problems on a CBC special. The Windsor contingent was repeatedly passed over. Even former mayor John Millson didn't get a chance to speak". The second incident involved 13 local panellists who "...had been invited by CBC television to speak out on cross border shopping...only six of the 13 got to say a word. The hour-long news special was monopolized by retailers and politicians from Toronto".

96. Bruce Taylor, interview with M. Gauthier, 7 February 1995.
97. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention re: Baton's application to provide local news to Windsor, 1993, p. 6.
98. Honourable Herb Gray, brief to the CRTC, op.cit., p. 2.
99. Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition", Amy Gutmann (ed.), (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1992, p. 25.
100. Young, op.cit., p. 9.
101. Ibid., p. 9.
102. Figures quoted by Ted Shaw in "Channel 9 newscasts make big comeback", *The Windsor Star*, 10 January 1995.
103. Ibid.
104. Veilleux as quoted by Ted Shaw in "Local programming won't be a priority", op.cit.
105. Alexander Kluge as quoted by Stuart Liebman, "On New German Cinema, Art, Enlightenment and the Public Sphere: An Interview with Alexander Kluge", in October, Fall 1988, p. 41.
106. Ibid., p. 41.
107. Albert Hirschman as quoted by Jean Bethke Elshtain in Democracy on Trial. (Basic Books: New York), 1995, p. 130.
108. Ibid., p. 130.
109. Elshtain in Ibid., p. 130.
110. Boyd, op.cit.
111. Edmonds, op.cit.

112. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, re: Baton's application to provide local Windsor news, 1993, pp. 3-4.
113. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, 1992-13, p. 4.
114. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention, 19 March 1993, p. 6.
115. City of Windsor, CRTC Intervention 1992-13, op.cit., p. 7.
116. Stan Cunningham, "Cuts return Windsor area to hinterland", *The Windsor Star*, 15 December 1990.
117. Letter from Trevor Price to Mayor John Millson, 6 December 1990, p. 2.
118. Letter from the co-chairpersons of the Other Options Committee to Patrick Watson and Gérard Veilleux, 4 January 1991, p. 2.
119. Letter from Howard Pawley and Charles Clark to Patrick Watson and Gerard Veilleux, 4 January 1991, p. 2.
120. As NABET argued in its 18 March 1991 brief to the CRTC, pp. 9-10: "The Corporation has shown utter contempt for our members and others by refusing to consult with us, as employees, as to how budget restraints could best be handled". NABET then quoted an October 1990 statement from President Gérard Veilleux, "...I want us to cooperate more closely with one another and be more open and responsive to those around us...". As NABET concluded, "Mr. Veilleux, believe us, it certainly was a surprise for us to learn on 'The National' that we were being closed down. What you said to your employees in October rang very hollow on December 5th. It is clear to us that you are not living up to your stated values, goals and objectives".
121. Letter from Tom Aubin to Howard Pawley, 28 January 1991.
122. Howard Pawley, op.cit.
123. Peter Allies as quoted by Ted Shaw in "Interest outstrips hope for local news", *The Windsor Star*, 15 March 1991, p. A8.
124. Memo to Members of the Other Options Committee from Mayor John Millson, 14 March 1991.
125. Edmonds, op.cit.



126. The CBC as quoted by Herb Gray in a 21 April 1992 letter to Keith Spicer, CRTC Chairman, p. 3.
127. ----- "CBC did about face, mayor says: deal to restore local programming to Windsor was killed", *The Globe and Mail*, 21 March 1991, p. C1.
128. Memo from John Millson, Charles Clark and Howard Pawley to the members of the Other Options Committee, 14 March 1991.
129. Among the proposals rejected by the CBC were those submitted by CBET-TV employees, CFPL Broadcasting Ltd in London and The Riverton-Great Lakes Production Company of Windsor.
130. This is not to suggest that concern over journalistic standards, quality of coverage and issues addressed were not important considerations for the Other Options Committee. In fact, in establishing their "minimum television requirements", the Other Options Committee had argued that "this local coverage should be of the highest professional journalistic and production standards". These standards included provisions for emergency broadcasts, additional non-news local programming, financial stability of the enterprise and enforceability of the programming agreement.
131. Most third-party proposals for the provision of local news in Windsor clearly stated their intent to respect the CBC's journalistic and production standards. For instance, Great Lake Riverton, a successful independent television production company with studio and offices in Windsor that wished to program local news, indicated in its proposal to Gérard Veilleux that "the proposed news service will adopt all CBC programming guidelines except for those guidelines that the management determines will undermine the ability of the local programming to serve - and be competitive - in the local market". (p. 3)
132. "CBC's mandate: getting the picture", editorial, *The Windsor Star*, 20 March 1991, p. A6.
133. Boyd, op.cit.
134. "Channel 9 - No help from CRTC", editorial, *The Windsor Star*, 29 June 1991.
135. Gérard Veilleux, letter to the CRTC, November 1991.
136. Duanne Plummer as quoted by Roseanne Danese, op.cit.

137. Ibid.
138. In a June 1969 brief to the CRTC, The Canadian Television Committee, a group composed of concerned citizens, university students and city council members all from the Windsor area, urged the Commission to ensure that Windsor - Essex County benefit from "an unambiguously Canadian television service".
139. The Canadian Television Committee, Brief to the CRTC, June 1969, p. 10.
140. John McKnight as quoted by Jean Bethke Elshtain, op.cit., pp. 17-18.
141. Lawrence Daressa as quoted by Patricia Aufderheide in "Public television and the public sphere" in Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol. 8(2), 1991, p 180.
142. Tom Carney as quoted by Michael Hurst in The Corporation of the City of Windsor Intervention Re: CRTC - Notice of Public Hearing 1992-13.
143. Percy Hatfield, op.cit.
144. Roger Faubert, op.cit.

## REVITALIZING THE IDEAL OF DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

I began this thesis by stating that the revitalization of the public sphere is inextricably linked to the revitalization of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in the public broadcasting project. While I did not tie the ideal exclusively to public broadcasting institutions, I did note that my intent was to demonstrate how the same problematic assumptions underlying Habermas' conception of the ideal public sphere also plague traditional understanding of public broadcasting. In particular, I critiqued the notion of one, all-encompassing arena of discursive interaction as well as the insistence on a sharp separation between public and private realms and between civil society and the State. As I demonstrated, these three problematic assumptions only serve to reinforce the coercive, nonpublic and self-deceptive nature of both Habermas' ideal public sphere and traditional public broadcasting programming and administration. The goal of this critique was thus to identify the constitutive components of the ideal of democratic communication as they manifest themselves in existing or yet to be envisaged public service media. In recovering what I perceive to be the degraded ideal of democratic communication implicit in public broadcasting, I hoped to retrieve the ideal from the hands of those who had coopted it to contract the sphere of public debate while purporting to promote free and open discussion. In so doing, I sought to

reinforce the theoretical and practical links between innovative public service media, the creation of an active citizenry and the widespread development of democracy.

Before I share the conclusions to which I came with regards to how public broadcasting, and more generally, public service media, might contribute to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication, I must address two arguments that seek to undermine such a research project. The first argument questions the validity of attempting to reposition public service media and public television broadcasting in particular, as a catalyst for the revitalization of the public sphere. Proponents of this approach argue that rather than attempt to retrieve the ideal of democratic communication which I argue is implicit in public broadcasting, communication researchers should openly acknowledge that the enhancement of democracy via public television is an idea whose time has passed. Therefore, rather than flog a dead horse or attempt to transform it into a motorcar on the new information highway, intellectual energy and attention should instead be focused on emerging media technologies that are presumed to be fuelled by different imperatives and are thus capable of offering different answers to our communicative needs.

Such an approach was advocated by Gerald Mander as early as 1978 in his polemical treatise Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television. In this book Mander argued that "television technology is inherently antidemocratic... Television freewayizes, suburbanizes and commoditizes human beings who are

then easier to control. Meanwhile those who control television consolidate their power"<sup>1</sup>. Neil Postman, in his often quoted book Amusing Ourselves to Death, came to a similar conclusion with regards to the incompatibility of television and meaningful discursive interaction. As Postman explains: "Our culture's adjustment to the epistemology of television is by now all but complete; we have so thoroughly accepted its definitions of truth, knowledge and reality that irrelevance seems to us to be filled with import, and incoherence seems eminently sane"<sup>2</sup>. This same torch has most recently been taken up by futurist George Gilder who in his book Life After Television contends that "in a broadcast medium, artists and writers cannot appeal to the highest aspirations and sensibilities of individuals. Instead manipulative masters rule over huge masses of people. Television is a tool of tyrants"<sup>3</sup>.

Rather than focus on a medium whose overthrow will be a major victory for "freedom and individuality, culture and morality"<sup>4</sup>, Gilder thus urges researchers, government officials and legislators to concentrate their efforts on deregulating the communications environment to hasten the arrival of the "teleputer" age. According to Gilder:

The teleputer will reverse the effects of the television age. Rather than exalting mass culture, the teleputer will enhance individualism. Rather than cultivating passivity, the teleputer will promote creativity. Instead of a master-slave architecture, the teleputer will have an interactive architecture in which every receiver can function as a processor and transmitter of video images and other information...Perhaps most important, the teleputer will enrich and strengthen democracy and capitalism all around the world<sup>5</sup>.

Ironically, Gilder's predictions about the future of the teleputer echo many of the early predictions about the impact of television when it was first introduced into North American society in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The problem, however, with the approach taken by authors such as Mander, Postman and Gilder, is that to accept these authors' conclusions is to fail to explore why media such as public television that are now deemed by many to be "passé", but once promised much, never realized their implicit ideals. Rather than explore the inherent contradictions and tensions of television broadcasting, these authors focus exclusively on what is often deemed the medium's most negative effects: the tendency toward passivity, manipulation and social control. However, the paradox of television, as Habermas himself noted, is that the mass media "hierarchize and at the same time remove restrictions on the possible communication. The one aspect cannot be separated from the other -and therein lies their ambivalent potential"<sup>6</sup>.

By failing to thoroughly discern and explore the tensions implicit in the dominant medium of our time, there is a strong possibility that researchers may end up glorifying, after the fact, the democratic potential of the communication processes inherent in a medium they never fully understood or exploited. Arguably, such is the case with Canadian public radio broadcasting, which although it has long been surpassed as the dominant medium of communication in Canadian society, now comes closer to realizing the ideal of democratic

communication than its television counterpart. Therefore, if we are to harness the democratic potential inherent in each of the available media of communication, we cannot simply gratuitously dismiss the untapped possibilities of one medium as it is superseded by the next. Although it may be very difficult and even problematic to articulate the ideal implicit in a medium such as public television, this is no reason for eschewing it<sup>7</sup>. Otherwise, we end up facing the same or similar communicative conundrums and barriers in new media technologies. These barriers are not so much a product of the medium's epistemic limitations as they are a product of our inability to imagine better or different uses to which the technology could be put.

The second argument I must address is one that takes issue not with the intent of my research project, but with the approach. Those who hold this view recognize the importance of attempting to link the revitalization of public service media to the revitalization of the public sphere. What these theorists question, however, is the need to base this project on an ideal such as the ideal of democratic communication which presupposes that human beings are inherently dialogical and that public service media have an inherent social purpose. As John Keane explains in The Media and Democracy, the new public service model that he advocates rejects notions of communication entitlements as fundamental human rights:

...it is instead guided, philosophically speaking by a form of democratic scepticism which acknowledges the facts of complexity, diversity and difference, and which - in plain English - harbours doubts about whether any one person, group, committee, party or organization can ever be trusted to make superior choices on matters of concern to citizens<sup>8</sup>.

According to this approach what is needed are "new and undogmatic arguments for the compatibility and superiority of both the democratic method and public service communication"<sup>9</sup>.

While I agree with the need for new and undogmatic arguments, we should not privilege democratic communication via public service media because it is the most pragmatic response to uncertainty and scepticism in our lives. Public service media may benefit, in part, from a pragmatic acceptance of the need for risk management and democratic scepticism, but this clearly cannot be the only criterion which guides their development or renewal. Rather, the ideal of democratic communication should be privileged because it has its own intrinsic value, one which is irrepudiable by citizens who wish to be actively engaged in the processes of self-realization and democratic decision-making.

Although theorists who advocate a pragmatic, instrumentalist approach refuse to acknowledge that any ideal should guide the revitalization of the public sphere, their arguments in favour of democracy via public service media are not based on non-foundationalist reasoning. For instance, in Keane's model of democracy and public service media, the ideal to be achieved is one of fair



dealing as a social virtue and efficiency as the guiding principle. This ideal is never challenged, and thus never fully expounded or explored, because it is naturalized as part of the pragmatic response to the perceived problem of securing democratic communication in the public sphere via decentralized networks of public communication.

Ironically, however, authors such as Keane who purport to eschew foundationalist reasoning in order to favour complexity and openness in their respective models of media and democracy, severely curtail the possibilities of identifying goods in common because they dismiss the *possibility* that human agents could be motivated *a priori* by an ideal of public service media worth pursuing in concert. As Leslie Good contends in "Power, Hegemony and Communication Theory",

In addition to asking questions about power that refer to its location - 'who-whom' questions that get at the ideas of 'responsibility' and 'gain' - Lukes recently suggested that we might also ask the question 'Who can serve the achievement of collective goods?' That question permits us to identify critical access points in the struggle over media images and representations<sup>10</sup>.

Insofar as the espousal of the ideal of democratic communication implicit in public service media facilitates not the predetermination, but the pursuit and identification of both collective goods and critical discursive access points, it is thus a useful and necessary starting point for any discussion of the relationship between media and democracy. Therefore, contrary to the belief of those who advocate non-foundationalist reasoning, the positing of an ideal,

in and of itself, does not undermine the openness of the argumentation or the communicative process.

### Towards the realization of the ideal...

If public broadcasting has a role to play in the revitalization of the public sphere and if the ideal of democratic communication is a good worth espousing, then the question remains: what are the constitutive components of this ideal and how can public broadcasting realize its implicit project? To begin with the latter part of the question first, if public service media, and more specifically, public broadcasting, are to contribute to the realization of the ideal of democratic communication they cannot be conceptualized in a vacuum or operate in insolation. Rather than be analyzed as *objects* of communication whose programs, policies or technologies can be independently assessed, public service media need to be understood as "a *process* inherent in all social life"<sup>11</sup> (italics mine). To say that media of communication are a process inherent in all social life is to recognize as does James Carey in Communication as Culture, that "...media of communication are not merely instruments of will and purpose but definite forms of life: organisms, so to say, that reproduce in miniature the contradictions in our thought, action and social relations"<sup>12</sup>. It is also to acknowledge as does Hermann Bausinger that "...media of communication cannot be separated from direct personal communication. Media contacts are material for conversation"<sup>13</sup>.

Public service media thus function not as self-contained and self-

sufficient arenas of discursive interaction, but as facilitators and catalysts for the creation and maintenance of other arenas of discursive exchange. John Dewey clearly understood this symbiotic relationship between public service media and the local community, one of the key access points to the public sphere. As he argued in 1927: "Improvements in the 'flow of social intelligence' will leave the public only 'partially informed and formed' until such intelligence 'circulates from one to another in the communications of the local community'"<sup>14</sup>.

This emphasis on the crucial links and intersections between communication that circulates via public service media and that which takes place on an interpersonal level amongst individuals and communities, leads in turn to a more encompassing definition of the role of human agents in these communicative processes. When public service media are understood as a process inherent in all social life, the human agents who interact with their programs and policies are seen to be actively, self-reflexively and continuously engaged in processes of meaning production both for themselves and for the groups/collectivities with which they identify and on whose behalf they intercede. Understood from this perspective, the production component of public service communication is not limited to those who create programming for distribution or administer public service institutions. Rather, the productive process extends itself to all those who interact with the media. This interaction can take the form of creative interpretation and usage of the televisual

experience. It can also stem from innovative reformulation and/or transference of the television experience into other media or modes of communication.

Regardless of what form this productive work takes, if public service media are to realize their implicit ideal of democratic communication, their programming and administrative structures must fundamentally reflect, and account for, the varied and vast possibilities of human interaction with the media. As Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge insist:

...any emancipatory critical venture cannot, as a matter of principle, set out from the viewer who stays in front of his set. The interaction between viewer and program, which must play a role in the individual television product, has to orient itself according to a broader conception of the circumstances in which the viewer finds himself and not simply tie him to the screen<sup>15</sup>.

This broader conception of the relationship between human agents and public service media, must necessarily address and articulate the wider political, social, cultural, economic and moral circumstances which both influence and inspire these communicative exchanges. In particular, this means moving beyond what Ian Angus describes as "the model of mediation of beliefs by media of communication in liberalism [which] presupposes that economic processes are 'prior' to the mediation and that political processes are 'subsequent' to it"<sup>16</sup>.

When the mass mediated experience is understood from this perspective, public broadcasting need no longer be posited as a manipulative instrument of social control which "positions a viewer/listener within an implied relationship

that hides the deceptive distance and unidirectional flow of conventional broadcast structure"<sup>17</sup>. Instead of a stagnant apparatus of distribution or a formidable, immutable and unidirectional transmitter of ideas, public service media can be conceived as a kaleidoscope, one which offers human beings the possibility of constructing, deconstructing or reconstructing an array of images, ideas, and thus interpretations of social reality. This productive work remains subject to the coercive powers of the system's knowledge-brokers, but it is not solely influenced by those who control the distribution process. It is also a result of the social history of the audience, the individual experience and knowledge of the viewer and the particular historical and cultural contingency of the viewing environment.

Theorists such as Jean Bethke Elshtain who insist that "watching television is necessarily a privatizing experience [one that] appeals to us as consumers, not public citizens"<sup>18</sup> thus fail to acknowledge the complexity, the diversity and the inherent interactivity of the televisual experience. Clearly, when citizens are relegated to what Janine Marchessault describes as a position of "access without agency", they are more likely to view their relationship with public service media as one of private consumption or pleasure. However, when the prepackaged television product is seen to be of lesser importance than the use of the media as a "sparkplug for process"<sup>19</sup>, television can be more widely conceived and harnessed as a catalyst for discursive participation and exchange in the public sphere.

As a result, rather than be a limitation on its public role, the fact that television is often experienced in the confines of the domestic setting may foster the establishment of links between private and public realms. As Shaun Moores notes, television paradoxically involves "staying home and going places simultaneously"<sup>20</sup>. Or as John Corner argues in "The Interview as Social Encounter":

In television, unlike the cinema, the viewing space of the audience (home) can be intimately aligned with the institutional space of tv (the studio/station) promoting a sense of mutual interiority in respect of which excursions to the actualities of the 'outside world' can proceed as joint ventures<sup>21</sup>.

This physical dimension of travel, of being here and there at once, is reproduced on a conceptual plane by the audience's ability to simultaneously grasp the immediacies of their lives and the metaphors of others' experiences<sup>22</sup>. Television facilitates this process by creating an environment particularly conducive to resonance, that is to say, an environment in which specific statements in specific contexts can acquire universal significance which through the use of metaphors "unify and invest with meaning a variety of [individual or local] attitudes or experiences"<sup>23</sup>.

The publicness of public service media could thus be said to reside not so much in a place, as in a state of being and of mind. As Thomas Goodnight argues:

Public discourse addresses those whose consent is requested and at its optimum provides knowledge sufficient for informed decisions by those urged to act or suffer the

consequences of choices. When the complete risks are laid out, when the meaning of a collective act is seen from all its perspectives, when provision is made to include those whose assent is warranted - even to the perspectives of generations yet unborn - then public discourse extends itself to its widest capacity<sup>24</sup>.

To realize the ideal of democratic communication then, human agents must benefit from repeated opportunities to make full use of their public and private experience and knowledge in order to continuously redefine these realms in light of the ever-changing needs and expectations of the communities in which these definitions circulate.

The emphasis on public service media as integrative arenas of discursive interaction in which individuals can fashion and refashion their individual and group interests and identities, is not meant to suggest that identity confirmation activities should take precedence over attempts to fashion and refashion public goods. This is precisely what some theorists such as Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Habermas before her, fear: that modern society, characterized as it is by the politics of displacement, will become increasingly one in which private identity takes precedence over public ends or purposes. According to this interpretation, the public sphere would become a forum in which "one's private identity becomes who and what one is in public and public life is about confirming that identity"<sup>25</sup>.

Yet to the contrary, the emphasis on the public sphere's seminal role as a site of identity formation and confirmation is intended to underscore the fact that the processes of self-realization and of democratic decision-making are

elements of a symbiotic process. As a result, neither private concerns nor public goods can be subsumed to the needs and imperatives of the other. Rather, these processes must necessarily operate in tandem. Discursive activities to define individual and group identities and interests lead in turn to decision-making responsibilities. Assuming decision-making roles leads anew to a stronger or more meaningful conception of self- and self-interest which then facilitates group solidarity and the determination of collective goods. Understood from this perspective, the communicative process as mediated by public service media is not an essentially privatizing experience, but one in which the boundaries between, and the definitions of, public and private goods and interests are continuously being articulated and contested.

However, for public service media to serve as a sparkplug for this process, theorists cannot preoccupy themselves exclusively with the existing power relations or accept these power relations as given. In particular, a concerted effort must be made to de-emphasize the professionalization of journalism as this tendency only naturalizes and solidifies knowledge-brokers' rapport with both the state and the market. Rather, theorists must identify and grapple with the critical access points which foster and facilitate citizens' perennial participation in decision-making roles both within and via public service media. In exploring how citizens as both members of the public and the audience can act in concert to develop and sustain these crucial access points, theorists must transcend the public/private, consumer/citizen dichotomies that



underscore most theories of the media and democracy. In particular, they must analyze how one's actions and opinions as a member of the audience create and sustain opportunities for action and decision-making as a member of the public and vice versa. As James Carey argues: "The public will begin to reawaken...when they are addressed as a conversational partner and are encouraged to join the talk rather than sit passively as spectators before a discussion conducted by journalists and experts"<sup>26</sup>.

Theorists must also recognize that, just as no two individuals' roles as citizens and consumers engaged in discursive interaction via the media can be dictated or determined absolutely, the function or use to which each media outlet is put cannot be definitely proscribed. The best researchers can hope to accomplish is to encourage both citizens and public service media institutions to take up the discursive positions that are most likely to reinvigorate the ideal of democratic communication, and by extension the public sphere itself. In essence, this means that the traditional preoccupation with balance in public service media programs, institutions and systems must be displaced by a new emphasis on extending and reverberating sensibility on both a territorial and psychological plane. This sensibility cannot be dictated from either the centre or the margins, but must emanate simultaneously from a variety of institutional and discursive sites. However, in order to sustain this process, the freedom and equality implicit in both notions of individuality and sociability, must be regarded as complementary, not contradictory forces.

### The constitutive components of the ideal

Taking all of the foregoing observations and concerns into account, the constitutive components of the ideal of democratic communication boil down to a dynamic, yet decisive combination of trust, autonomy and accountability. These three elements provide both a foundation and a framework for human agents to create and clarify; negotiate and sustain; and redefine and re-establish individual and collective interests, identities and goods. However, it is fruitless for human agents to engage in processes of individual and collective self-definition and self-realization in isolation. As Charles Taylor repeatedly stresses:

...to define ourselves we must determine what is significant in our difference with others, we can only define our respective identities against a background of things that matter - to bracket our history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity, everything but what I find in myself-would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters<sup>27</sup>.

Public service media thus play a crucial role insofar as they offer human agents both access points and integrative arenas of discursive interaction in which they can explore, question and articulate conceptions of themselves, of others and of the society in which they jointly live.

Trust is an essential component of this process in that it enables individuals to integrate past experiences with future events in a way which will ensure inner authenticity and psychological coherence. The need for trust is heightened by the fact that while attempts to remove all barriers to participation increase autonomy and equality among participants, they also

disrupt individuals' inward ease and self-sufficiency. Widespread trust is thus required to maintain and reinforce each participant's sense of boundedness, of horizons of significance and of individual integrity. Moreover, even if all citizens could be discursive equals at all times and in all settings, or if they could overcome the inherent feelings of uneasiness that stem from the total respect of others' freedom, trust would still be a pre-requisite. As Anthony Giddens notes: "It has been said that trust is 'a device for coping with the freedom of others' but the prime condition or requirement for trust is not lack of power, but lack of information"<sup>28</sup>. Given the thoroughly reflexive nature of discursive interaction and each individual's inability to be knowledgeable about all subjects or issues at all times, trust is therefore an inescapable pre-condition for the realization of the ideal of democratic communication.

The respect and promotion of autonomy is also an essential pre-requisite to multiply the means and avenues for discursive interaction and participation in decision-making activities. As previously explained, autonomy is necessary to increase the complex levels of freedom and equality of all citizens engaged in self-determination and collective fulfilment. Significantly, when autonomy becomes a guiding principle, then pluralism, intrinsic analysis, participatory democracy and mutual accountability which underlie the communicative ethics required to realize the ideal, become not only pre-conditions, but also achievements of political action and speech which give public expression to difference<sup>29</sup>. As a result, by emphasizing this communicative ethics in

discursive exchanges which take place both within and about public service media, the authentic and equal self-representation of all deliberants will be encouraged and facilitated. Obviously, the possibility of misrepresentation or of the use of coercive force remains a real threat. However, when the possibility of autonomous action is absent *a priori*, then misrepresentation of both oneself and of others is almost guaranteed thereby reinforcing the likelihood of self-alienation and self-deception, processes which undermine the ideal itself.

For its part, accountability is crucial to ensure reasonable and responsible interaction amongst autonomous citizens who place their trust in one another and in public service media as viable and vibrant arenas of discursive exchange. While interactivity has always been a latent component of public service media programming and administration, it has never underscored the process of discursive exchange between public broadcasters and their respective audiences because reasonable, accountable and autonomous dialogue has never been the predominant concern of public service administrations. To compound the problem, many argue that public service media cannot become truly accountable public fora, even if they were to reorganize and rethink their priorities, unless the system of political representation and decision-making as a whole is itself radically reorganized.

Clearly, there is no escaping the fact that the democratization of public service media must go hand in hand with the democratization of the societies

in which these institutions operate. However, while recognizing that public service media cannot sustain independently and indefinitely a radically reconceived participatory relationship with the citizens they serve, they can attempt to lead by example, pushing the envelope of public service's interaction with citizens towards a mutually accountable relationship. To argue that no change is possible without a radical redefinition of the system of representation as a whole, is to limit one's thinking to a chicken and egg scenario, a vicious circle, which undermines any attempt to revitalize the public sphere via one of its central institutions, public service media.

Once public service media accept the creation and development of trustworthy, autonomous and accountable arenas of discursive arenas as their organizing goal, they can begin to make a contribution towards to the realization of both the ideal of democratic communication and the revitalization of the public sphere. It is important to note, however, that in embracing these guiding principles, public service media will not free themselves inextricably from all further controversy or debate. To the contrary, as Ian MacIntyre is quick to suggest, "a tradition....when vital embodies continuities of conflict and...when a tradition is in good order it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives the tradition its particular point or purpose"<sup>30</sup>.

The end result then, of recovering the degraded ideal of democratic communication implicit in public service media and of re-asserting its

constitutive components is not to categorically define immutable characteristics of public broadcasting or definitively assert its purpose and pertinence. Rather, it is to identify and heighten the implicit tensions and conflicts which underpin its potentially crucial role in the definition and enactment of social identities and group opinion formation. Such a conception of public service media increases citizens' freedom and equality by providing both access points and integrative discursive arenas in which the processes of self-realization and democratic decision-making can flourish. It is therefore by creating the optimum environment and enticement for the realization of the ideal at the hands of an active citizenry that public service media can best facilitate and foster the revitalization of both democratic communication and a democratic public sphere.

## END NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

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3. George Gilder, Life After Television, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company), 1994, p. 49.
4. Ibid., p. 49.
5. Ibid., p. 46.
6. Jurgen Habermas.
7. This is a paraphrase of Charles Taylor's observations in The Malaise of Modernity, (House of Anansi Press: Concord), 1991, p. 96.
8. John Keane, The Media and Democracy, (Cambridge: Polity Press), 1991, p. 168.
9. Ibid., p. 174.
10. Leslie Good, "Power, Hegemony and Cultural Theory" in Cultural Politics in Contemporary America, Ian Angus and Suth Jhally (eds), (New York: Routledge), 1989, p. 63.
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21. John Corner, "The Interview as Social Encounter" in Broadcast Talk, Paddy Scannell (ed.), (London: Sage Publications), 1991, p. 32.
22. paraphrase of Clifford Geertz in "Found in Translation: Social History of the Moral Imagination", in Local Knowledge, (New York: Basic Books), 1983, p. 48.
23. Northrope Frye as quoted by Neil Postman in Amusing Ourselves to Death, op.cit., pp. 17-18.
24. Thomas Goodnight, "Public discourse", Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol. 4, 1987, p. 431.
25. Elshtain, op.cit., p. 53.
26. James Carey as quoted by Theodore L. Glasser in "Communication and the Cultivation of Citizenship", Communication, Vol. 12, 1991, p. 246.
27. Taylor, op.cit., part IV.
28. Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1990, p. 33.



29. Dana Villa, referring to Hannah Arendt, makes a similar observation in "Postmodernism and the public sphere" in American Political Science Review, Vol. 86 (3), September 1992, p. 717.
30. Ian MacIntyre as quoted by Richard Bernstein in "'One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy" in The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 1991, p. 245.

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