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Shaping the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond

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In recent years, there has been an explosion of ambitious sociological research that attempts to map and explain the dynamics of media understood not as technologies or individual organizations but rather as systems interacting with other systems. This approach has multiple roots, but in this essay, I argue that its reach and influence have been amplified by the work of Jürgen Habermas, especially through his concept of the "public sphere." Habermas has been especially helpful in clarifying normative debates about democracy, and he is right to suggest that normative criteria can usefully guide empirical research. Yet his own empirical model, despite some recent improvements, remains underdeveloped and moreover, embodies debatable assumptions about the social origins of democratic and intellectual renewal. Habermas, and many sociologists of social movements influenced by or implicitly allied to his project, make the mistake of taking the "media system" as a given and then orienting their analysis toward effective strategies to exert influence in the face of this supposedly invariant media "logic." A new generation of researchers, influenced by Bourdieu and state-oriented new institutionalism, is fortunately moving to fill in this gap just at the moment when journalists and activists are searching for guidance in rebuilding a media system devastated by commercial pressures and the inadequately remunerated shift to online platforms. This opportunity for sociology to describe and explain variations in media logics and to actively engage in shaping these logics for democratic ends must not be missed.

In the remainder of this essay, I thus attempt to address the following questions: First: What has Habermas contributed to the sociology of media and communication? And to what extent and in what ways has his conceptual apparatus—chiefly the

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concept of public sphere—been adopted by sociologists studying media? Second: What are the crucial gaps or conceptual problems in Habermas's original empirical model of the public sphere? Third: To what extent do Habermas's new "public sphere" model, Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, and American new institutionalism help us to build an even more nuanced, critical macro-sociology of media? And finally, how can these insights be built upon to guide much needed policy reform efforts? Such a research program is entirely in sync with Ron Jacobs's persuasive argument in this issue that a revived media sociology will need to engage once again with the larger issues of "the public" first raised in the American context by Robert Park. However, whereas Park emphasizes community, ritual, and social interaction, the new media sociology I outline here would place the primary emphasis on power.

Contributions and Shortcomings of Habermas's *Structural Transformation*

With the English-language publication of a short encyclopedia essay on "The Public Sphere" (1974) and *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Jürgen Habermas brought his considerable symbolic capital to the Anglo-American sociology of media.

While any summary cannot do justice to Habermas's impressive historical reconstruction of the emergence of a communicative ideal-type, the basic thesis of *Structural Transformation* is fairly straightforward. Both contributing to and reflecting broader social changes, the emergence of a small-scale bourgeois "public sphere" of coffeehouses, salons, and small political journals challenged the principle of traditional feudal rule and brought into being a new basis for authority: the consensus emerging from the public's open-ended, critical argumentation and debate. In reality, this early "public" was limited to property-owning European-origin men, and the new democracies that challenged the old feudal systems served the immediate interests of this new social class. But arguing against his Frankfurt School mentors, Habermas wanted to assert that there nevertheless remained the kernel of something emancipatory in this admittedly exclusive club. The principle of universal participation meant that inevitably access would have to be granted to women, former slaves, and other marginalized groups. At the same time, contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno who saw the rational-critical thought of the Enlightenment leading in some inevitable sense to the gas chambers and the atomic bomb, Habermas insisted that there was some aspect of rationality that lay outside the realm of instrumental action and domination—a theme he was to develop at greater length, not without its own problems, in later work.

Even if Habermas started out less pessimistically than his first generation Frankfurt School predecessors, he nevertheless ended up much at the same place. In Habermas's telling, as European and North American societies underwent dramatic industrialization and population growth, the scale and scope of social and political communication changed markedly, organized not around face-to-face and small scale communication, but via an increasingly commercialized print and audio-visual media system. Historically, Habermas (1989: 185) argues, the "press itself became manipulable to the extent that it became commercialized," beginning in earnest in the mid-1800s; the public sphere was thus transformed from a forum for rational-

critical debate into a "platform for advertising" (Habermas 1989: 181). Even as voting and other political rights were extended to previously disenfranchised groups, expanding participation in public life, political debate in a commercialized public sphere lost its independent critical edge and became more sensationalized and trivialized.

Structural Transformation thus offers a powerful narrative of the rise and fall of democratic institutions across the industrialized west in the modern era. The press and mass media are central to his account, suggesting multiple lines of inquiry for cultural and media sociology, political sociology, sociology of social movements, and communication studies. Nevertheless, the full intellectual impact of these works was not fully grasped within sociology for at least a decade. Habermas is almost ignored in the *Annual Review of Sociology* articles devoted to media from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In review articles by Holz and Wright (1979), McQuail (1985), and Gamson et al. (1992), Habermas is not mentioned once. Only in 1997—8 years after the English-language publication of *Structural Transformation*—does the situation begin to change. In an *Annual Review* article on "Politics and Culture" published that year, Mabel Berezin (1997) prominently mentions Habermas (along with Bourdieu and Foucault) as "setting the research agenda of scholars who focus on macro-level social change." Berezin (1997: 366) goes on to note that "empirical work on the public sphere is just beginning to emerge." Since then, Habermas and/or the concept of the public sphere have been cited and discussed in *Annual Review of Sociology* articles on "Social Implications of the Internet" (DiMaggio et al. 2001), on "The Production of Culture Perspective" (Peterson and Anand 2004) and on "Video Cultures" by Grindstaff and Turow (2006). In other words, while it has taken awhile, Habermas has become increasingly central to sociologists of media and culture. This inspiration has opened, or re-opened, two important lines of inquiry: the first, normative, the second, empirical.

The normative debate concerns the proper role of media in democracy, or at least the range of proper ideals for a truly democratic media, and has highlighted three broad models of the public sphere (see Ferree et al. 2002; Baker 2002; Benson 2009a): elitist, deliberative, and pluralist.[1] In the elitist model, often associated with Walter Lippmann (1922/1997), the primary duties for the press are to examine the character and behavior of elected officials, to monitor closely their activities for corruption or incompetence, to critically analyze policy proposals, and to provide reliable, in-depth information about social problems. Whereas in the elitist model the press largely acts on behalf of the public (a goal embraced by most journalists and embodied in the notion of "watchdog" or investigative reporting), in the deliberative model, the press works alongside the public to "support reflection and value or policy choice" (Baker 2002: 148–149). In the deliberative model (with which Habermas's name has become virtually synonymous), mainstream media like the BBC and the *Washington Post* are not valued so much for their well-funded capacity

[1] Elitist democracy, the term also used by Baker (2002) corresponds to Ferree et al.'s (2002) "representative liberal" model. "Deliberative" corresponds to Baker's "republican" and Ferree et al.'s "discursive" model, both of which are closely aligned with Habermas. My "pluralist" model brings together Ferree et al.'s "participatory liberal" and "constructionist" models, the latter based in the feminist critique of Habermas; while there are some differences between participatory liberal and constructionist, both stress broad inclusion and acceptance of diverse discursive styles (not just rational argumentation).

to investigate as for their status as "inclusive, non-segmented media entities that support a search for general societal agreement on 'common goods'" (Baker 2002: 149). The deliberative model thus provides a benchmark to evaluate both journalistically-produced and non-journalistically-produced discourse on the internet, and other public forums, in relation to such standards as civility, direct engagement of opposing viewpoints, and reasoned argumentation (Wessler 2008b; Ferree et al. 2002: 232–254). Finally, the pluralist model places the greatest emphasis on diversity and inclusion. In its feminist "constructionist" version (see Ferree et al. 2002: 222–229; Fraser 1992), there is an extra emphasis on recuperating voices from the periphery, on being broadly inclusive as well in the substance and style of discourse (expanding the notion of what is "political," and making room for personal narrative and emotion as well as cold reason), and on avoiding premature closure of public debate. Habermas (1992, 1996, 2006) has been attentive to these critiques, and in his more recent work he has incorporated elements of both pluralist/constructionist and elitist critiques into a broad normative model that Baker (2002: 143–147; see also Curran 2000) labels "complex democracy"; nevertheless, Habermas remains most closely associated with a deliberative model, even if he is now less insistent on the style, focus, or ultimate goals of public deliberation.

Habermas's account in *Structural Transformation* of the rise and fall of the western public sphere, however, also puts itself forward as an empirical model—and it is in relation to this aspect that it ultimately falls short. Setting aside the problems with the accuracy of his account of the press during the late 1700s and early 1800s (see, e.g., essays in Calhoun 1992b), Habermas's Frankfurt School-esque critique of contemporary commercialism may be accurate as far as it goes but doesn't offer much that is new from the classic political economy of media, and in fact, is more simplistic than some of the best recent analyses in this tradition (see, e.g., Golding and Murdoch 2000; McChesney 1999; Hesmondhalgh 2006). In particular, as I have argued elsewhere (Benson 2004), Habermas's empirical model in *Structural Transformation* overlooks the myriad social forces (governmental regulations and subsidies, non-profit ownership forms, journalist unions, associations, ethical codes, and professional traditions) that can and often do temper such commercial pressures. In other words, Habermas ignores the significant variations that have occurred in national public sphere development, both over time and cross-nationally. Such an understanding of media as constituting a kind of quasi-"universal" logic has been all too common in media sociology, especially among sociologists of social movements (relying heavily upon the U.S. newsroom studies referred to by Jacobs in this issue), using either "social constructionist" models (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1989) or Gramscian "hegemony" frameworks (e.g., Ryan 1991). Habermas has thus been easily appropriated within this kind of project (see, e.g., Oliver and Myers 1999).[2]

[2] Despite its avowed interest in movement success, by emphasizing the almost complete power of the mainstream commercial media to either discredit or at best tame activist causes this U.S.-centric literature has produced its own brand of fatalism. These scholars have never considered the possibility of achieving change by changing the media system itself!

Today, "public sphere" has become almost a cliché and is perhaps one of the most frequently used words in the sociology of media and communications.[3] Frequently, however, the term "public sphere" is used more as a rhetorical token than as a way to systematically organize research. There are of course notable exceptions. One is the classic *Theory and Society* article "Speaking of the President," by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (1984), used extensively in Ferree et al.'s (2002) comparative study of the German and U.S. public spheres. In this article, Hallin and Mancini contrast the "empty" public sphere of the U.S. with the "full" public sphere of Italy ("full," that is, of diverse political parties and civil society groups). They use these structural contrasts to help explain why U.S. television journalism is more interpretive and narrative-driven than Italian TV journalism (at least during the period of their study in the 1980s). Another is Arvind Rajagopal's (2001) comprehensive study of the politicization of Hindu religious fundamentalism via a newly commercialized Indian television system, both magnified and countered to a certain extent by the English-language press. Rajagopal thus accounts for the particular dynamics of this political process through a detailed reconstruction of what he terms a "split public sphere," split that is, by language, region, and class, in a complex circuit of cultural production and reception leading in some instances to political action. British sociologist Brian McNair (2000) maps a class-fragmented British public sphere, with each sub-sphere emphasizing different types of information and varying sharply in styles of presentation. And John Keane (1995a) presents a model of a multi-level, fragmented public sphere consisting of three levels—the micro- (sub-national), the meso- (national), and the macro- (regional as with the European Union, or global).[4]

In short, Habermas's early "Public Sphere" encyclopedia article and *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* have prompted a vigorous debate that continues to this day. These works helped broaden the interest in media beyond the realm of communications and media studies departments, either reviving or

[3] A recent survey of Amazon.com listings shows a flurry of recent books with Public Sphere in the title: *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Meyer and Moors 2006), *Media and Public Spheres* (Butsch 2007), *Heisenberg in the Atomic Age: Science and the Public Sphere* (Carson 2009), *The Arab Public Sphere in Israel: Media Space and Cultural Resistance* (Amal 2009), and *Mediating Europe: New Media, Mass Communications and the European Public Sphere* (Harrison and Wessels 2009), to name just a few. On another level, Al Gore (2007) extensively cites Habermas in his recent book, *The Assault on Reason*.

[4] In a spirited exchange between Keane and Nicholas Garnham (Keane 1995a, b; Garnham 1995), normative arguments related to a "strict" interpretation of what is or is not a public sphere undermine the empirical utility of the concept. As an example of a micro-public sphere, Keane cites inter-familial discussions about children's use of video games. The use of public sphere in this context earns Garnham's sharp rebuke, on the grounds of the de-politicized triviality of such discussions and their lack of any connection to the common national policy-making realm. Garnham is certainly right to question whether these micro-spheres meet the normative test of "deliberative" democracy, while Keane is clearly correct that forums of mediated information and social intercourse are multiplying and becoming more complex. The problem, it seems to me, is the equating of the term "public sphere" only with deliberative democratic ideals. As we will see, in his more recent work Habermas himself seems to be moving to a more expansive understanding of the term to encompass the actually existing ensemble of communicative practices, dominated by the mass media, which serve as "intermediaries" between the peripheral lifeworld and the core state apparatuses, and which may or may not achieve deliberative or other democratic normative ideals.

catalyzing new research in media across the academy. The notion of public sphere provides a widely known, legitimate theoretical framework that allows a new generation of media researchers to speak to one another across disciplines and specializations. And that is no small accomplishment. At the same time, it is not enough. With increasing urgency, the question has arisen: What can we now do to move beyond the close readings of the Habermasian sacred texts, and really use—or at least build upon Habermas—to analyze the problems and potentials of actually existing public spheres?

In his introduction to *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992a: 38), Craig Calhoun writes:

> [There is] a need for analysis of [the public sphere's] internal organization, something almost completely neglected in *Structural Transformation*... whatever its qualities, any public sphere is necessarily a socially organized field, with characteristic lines of division, relationships of force, and other constitutive features.

Likewise, Bernhard Peters (1997, in Wessler 2008a: 261, fn51), the late close collaborator with Habermas, wrote:

> In his groundbreaking study on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas did not make sufficiently clear what those structures [of public deliberation] were. [There is a need] to outline basic features of the public sphere, as a precondition for the study of their change or transformation.

In short, we need answers to such questions as: What is the empirical structural organization of the public sphere? How do public spheres vary cross-nationally? And what are the complex links between structural characteristics of public spheres and the form and content of mediated discourses?

In the next section, I briefly sketch three general kinds of theoretical solutions that have been proposed to such questions. The first is Habermas's own solution, via his latest reformulations of public sphere theory (influenced by Bernhard Peters). The second is Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. And the third is American "new institutionalism"—closely related to field theory, but with a greater emphasis on the structuring role of the state—which in turn calls into question a key assumption of both Habermas and Bourdieu: the ideal of media or journalistic autonomy.

Three Empirical Models of the Public Sphere: Strengths and Weaknesses

Peters/Habermas Revised Model

After putting forward in *Structural Transformation* a complex yet ultimately debilitating social analysis of a public sphere initially opposed to feudalism but then in turn "refeudalized," Habermas (1984) in a sense turned his back on society and focused his attention on the structure of social interactions at the micro-level, in the realm of voluntary personal relationships and communities which he termed the "lifeworld." Against Weber and the early Frankfurt School who viewed rationality as

ultimately "instrumental" (and thus implicated in and abetting relations of domination), Habermas identified another form of rationality which he termed "communicative action." This form of rationality is rooted in the "ideal speech situation" through which agents in the lifeworld hope to achieve, not domination, but rather mutual understanding. There is certainly some intuitive appeal to this theory. In our most intimate relations of kin and friendship, surely, there is a form of communication that cannot ultimately be reduced to power and domination. But one could argue that this formulation does not solve the problems posed in *Structural Transformation* but merely displaces them.

Even if an alternative to relations of domination exists in the lifeworld, the question remains: How can we begin to transpose this emancipatory logic into the "system" still dominated by instrumental rationality? Drawing extensively on the work of his late student and colleague Bernhard Peters (translated into English and collected in Wessler 2008a), Habermas (1996: 373) now acknowledges the multi-layered complexity of the contemporary public sphere, in an effort to develop a model with "empirical relevance."[5] This empirical model is developed in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) and in his 2006 keynote address to the International Communication Association in Dresden, Germany (adapted for publication in Habermas 2006).

In the essay that laid the foundation for this approach, Peters (1993) argues that democratic societies are organized according to principles of "center" and "periphery." The "institutional core of the system of government" has four departments: "the parliamentary complex, the judiciary, government ['the political leadership'] and administration ['non-political' or civil service]" (Peters 1993: 23). The outer periphery consists of the informal associations of the lifeworld's various "private" social spheres (Peters 1993: 20). Mass media, along with other public sphere organizations, play a crucial role as an intermediary "sluice" to bring progressive and emancipatory ideas from this outer periphery into the center. The public sphere is at the inner periphery of the political system, consisting of "mass media, opinion research, numerous and diverse communicative networks and 'publics' crystallized around current topics or around publications, professional contacts and contexts for discussion specific to particular milieus."[6] While the center or core is where "debates or processes linked to the resolution of problems are condensed and formed into decisions," the "legitimacy of (these)

[5] Habermas (in Wessler 2008a: 255, Forward, fn 2) acknowledges "the inspiration which I gained … from working closely with Bernhard Peters" (see also Habermas 1996: 330, 354 for further acknowledgements). Peters' first outline of this new empirical model appeared in his book *Die Integration moderner Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1993), whose shortened versions of sections 9.1 and 9.2, pp. 322–52, are translated as "Law, State and the Political Public Sphere as Forms of Self-organization" in Wessler 2008a: 17–32.

[6] Elsewhere, Peters (1997, in Wessler 2008a: 80) defines public sphere as "the entire universe of public deliberation occurring in a country" which is "anything but homogeneous, and in many cases not even tightly linked."

decisions depends on the formation of opinions and political will in the periphery" (Wessler 2008a: 25).[7]

Thus, in order for deliberative democracy to become an empirical reality, two conditions must be met according to Habermas's (2006: 420) most recent synthesis of this model: "first, a self-regulating media system must maintain its independence vis-à-vis its environments while linking political communication in the public sphere with both civil society and the political center," and second, "an inclusive civil society must empower citizens to participate in and respond to a public discourse that, in turn, must not degenerate into a colonizing mode of communication." Such degeneration, however, is a quite likely outcome, which Habermas views as "troubling, to say the least."

Commercialization need not necessarily lead to colonization, Habermas emphasizes: the late eighteenth century press showed that "commercial organization and distribution of intellectual products do not necessarily induce the commodification of both the content and the modes of reception" (Habermas 2006: 422). However, "under the pressure of shareholders who thirst for higher revenues," thus bringing about the "intrusion of the functional imperatives of the market economy in the 'internal logic' of the production and presentation of messages" in the public sphere, "issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment" such as "personalization, the dramatization of events, the simplification of complex matters, and the vivid polarization of conflicts [which] promote civic privativism and a mood of antipolitics" (Habermas 2006: 422). Sound familiar? Habermas's "new" social diagnosis, then, ends up not being all that different from the Weberian-Marxist analysis in *Structural Transformation*. While not entirely off the mark, Habermas ends up seeming both overly hopeful (in his newfound celebration of civil society and the periphery) and overly pessimistic (in his continued belief that "colonization" is the likely outcome).

In sum, while Habermas makes an important contribution by stressing the important links between civil society and the media, he continues to understate and undertheorize the potential pro-active role of the media in the public sphere. He insists on media "self-regulation," necessary he argues for it to play its neutral intermediary role between core and periphery. However, this conception is too modest, failing to imagine how the media—in league with anti-commercial reformist elements within the state—might help civil society avoid commercial colonization, or more positively, how it might act as a force for "communicative action" against instrumentalist domination.

[7] Arena theory, whose chief proponents are Jürgen Gerhards in Germany and Kurt Imhoff in Switzerland, bears some resemblance to this new public sphere theory (see also Koller 2006). In Ferree et al.'s (2002; of which Gerhards is a co-author) *Shaping Abortion Discourse*, the public sphere is portrayed as the set of multiple arenas of debate and deliberation (social movement, religious, political party, scientific, and legal), with the "mass media forum" characterized as the central or "master forum" (Ferree et al. 2002: 11). Influenced by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988), this arena theory offers a useful visual representation of a complex, multi-tiered public sphere; however, as deployed, it tends toward an overly pluralistic, voluntaristic model of power, over-stating the power of social movements to shape and reshape public discourse and policy—in a sense, the mirror image of the largely pessimistic analyses of Peters and Habermas.

Bourdieu's Field Theory

The field theory of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1993, 1995, 1998, 2005) provides us with a radically different perspective on the problem (or opportunity) of the "public sphere," a term that Bourdieu does not use. Using field theory, we can begin to construct a very different history of the public sphere and the news media.[8] For the public sphere of Habermas, the golden age of journalism and "publicity" is rooted in the politically "amateur" activities of public-spirited businessmen, printer-publishers, and intellectuals of the late eighteenth century. Bourdieu's historical analysis begins almost a century later, and he finds much to admire in the artistic, literary, and indeed, journalistic "fields" which emerged in France during the late nineteenth century. It is not quite correct to say that these fields "included" the great painters and writers Flaubert, Maupassant, Manet, Cezanne, etc.; rather it is these fields that provided the semi-autonomous social conditions through which the creativity of these artists could be constituted (see Bourdieu 1993, 1995). In subsequent years, there would be periods of decline, but the fall as in Habermas is not nearly so absolute. For Bourdieu, decline is not the product of institutionalization (commercial or governmental bureaucratic rationalization) as in Habermas; rather it is the result of *not enough* institutionalization (construction and retention of codified and uncodified protections of field autonomy). In short, contra Habermas, small is not necessarily beautiful in Bourdieu's model. In fact, a field may need to grow bigger in order to amass the cultural and economic resources to assure its continued autonomy.

Field theory also facilitates a more adequate mapping of the "center" than that provided by Habermas by incorporating powerful non-governmental as well as governmental sectors. Bourdieu would conceptualize the contemporary public sphere as a series of overlapping fields, including the political field, the economic (business) field, the academic field, the religious field, the field of non-governmental advocacy organizations, and at the center of this complex, the journalistic field. Each of these fields compete to impose its particular vision of the social world on society as a whole. The journalistic field is both the important site on which this struggle takes place, and a field with its own logic that contributes to the content and form of public discourse.

In a more general sense, for Bourdieu, there is no lifeworld serving as the generator of all that is true and good; there are only fields, each with their own form of strategic action oriented toward promoting or defending a particular definition of the true and the good. In response to a question of whether there are "domains of practice ... (such as 'small talk,' conversation between intimates, or other mundane 'forms of talk'...)" which escape or transcend relations of power, Bourdieu responds: "Every linguistic exchange contains the potentiality of an act of power .... This potentiality can be 'bracketed,' as often happens in the family and within relations of *philia* in Aristotle's sense of the term, where violence is suspended in a kind of pact

[8] For examples of the growing use of Bourdieu for the sociology of media, see, e.g., Davis (2002), Couldry (2003, 2007), Hallin and Mancini (2004), Benson (1999, 2004, 2006, 2009b), Benson and Neveu (2005), Benson and Saguy (2005), Townsley (2006), Bennett (2006), Rohlinger (2007), Baisnée and Marchetti (2006), Russell (2007), Glevarec and Pinet (2008), and Dickinson (2008).

of symbolic nonaggression." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 145). But for Bourdieu, such "bracketing" is not normatively generative; it is to critical science, as we will see, that one should look for an "ethic" and an "ideal for personal conduct" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 198–199). Whether or not we accept Bourdieu's extreme privileging of "science," the shift in emphasis from intimate lifeworlds to institutional fields seems to provide a surer blueprint for progressive social reform. Moreover, rather than looking to the periphery as the sole source of democratic renewal, field theory calls attention to the multiple, distinct perspectives that arise from fields (and sub-fields) each with their own semi-autonomous logics of practice (scientific, artistic, religious, business, trade union, legislative, judicial, political party, etc.). Thus, the extent to which the media draw upon these diverse fields is just as or more important than center/periphery dynamics.

Compared to Habermas, Bourdieu is much less troubled by instrumental or strategic action. He does not see it as necessarily allied with domination, and in fact, certain forms of strategic action are needed to overcome domination. Bourdieu posits that human existence is essentially conflictual; agents act strategically (unconsciously more than consciously) since their social existence (just as with linguistic meaning, as in Saussure) is bound up in the relational production of difference. But this conflict can take many forms, depending on the kinds of "capital" (most commonly, economic or cultural) that agents possess. Economic capital means simply money or assets that can be turned into money; cultural capital encompasses such things as educational credentials, technical expertise, general knowledge, verbal abilities and artistic sensibilities. In the political field, agents strive to amass governmental power; in the economic field, the most money. The greatest achievements of science and art are no less products of competitive fields; however, the very existence of such fields implies the achievement of a certain autonomy from political and economic power. In the scientific field, for instance, autonomy is thus expressed in the power wielded by weapons like "evidence" and "logical reasoning."

Thus, like Habermas, Bourdieu values highly the power and justice of the "better argument," defending the Enlightenment tradition against postmodern relativism. But unlike Habermas, he does not ground this position in intimate interpersonal relations. Rather, influenced by Durkheim, Bourdieu validates the very institutions—or at least some of them—that Habermas disparages. Reasoned argumentation and civic virtue are socially produced, and thus far from advocating a retreat from society (toward the supposedly more authentic, loosely-organized peripheral associations), one is led toward collective action to build and defend institutional walls in defense of creative and especially scientific autonomy. In what Bourdieu has called his "*Realpolitik* of Reason," he contrasts his position directly with that of Habermas: "If there exist, pace Habermas, no transhistorical universals of communication, there certainly exist forms of social organization of communication that are liable to foster the production of the universal" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 188, 190; see also Poupeau 2000). Or, as Nick Crossley (2004: 95) puts it, in a perceptive essay: "Bourdieu subverts the Habermasian distinction between strategic and communicative action by seeking out the structural conditions of fields which make 'communicative rationality' strategically viable." Crossley continues: "Journalists (and artists and scientists) are only rational and critical ... to the extent that they are constrained and have incentives to be so" (Crossley 2004: 97).

But where are these constraints or incentives to come from? It is at this point that Bourdieu, much like Habermas, fails to offer a solution adequate to the problem at hand. Both Bourdieu and Habermas (in his Peters-influenced writings) focus their attention on the single issue of journalistic autonomy—journalists constraining journalists. As noted, Habermas (2006: 419) advocates a "self-regulating media system"—that operates "in accordance with its own normative code"; Bourdieu (1998) favors a more autonomous journalistic field, that is, a space in which journalistic excellence is defined according to purely journalistic criteria, not by profit-maximizing or political criteria. Admittedly, journalists, like other professionals, do struggle to maintain some autonomy from external pressures. This is an empirical reality. Moreover, when these efforts are joined to collective action (via professional associations, unions, co-op ownership forms, etc.), they may in fact help preserve practices of reporting and writing that serve the larger society as well as journalists themselves. But autonomy is not a panacea for the public sphere. Journalists defining for themselves what is good journalism are not necessarily going to buy into the other parts of the Habermas and Bourdieu agendas. Habermas wants journalism to keep an open door to civil society, thus, especially emphasizing the pluralist ideal. Bourdieu wants journalism to give a greater voice to social scientists and critical writers and artists, thus, emphasizing perhaps even to a greater extent than Habermas the deliberative ideal of reasoned discourse. Yet, the record of even the most prominent journalists defending the ideals of pluralism and deliberation is mixed at best.

Do journalists want to play their part in promoting deliberative democracy? In fact, many U.S. journalists rejected the "public" or "civic" journalism movement begun during the 1990s,[9] which aimed precisely to put the ideals of Dewey and Habermas into journalistic practice (see Rosen 1999; Glasser 1999). Do journalists want to play their part in promoting social scientific knowledge and analysis? In fact, as Elihu Katz (1989) wrote in his essay, "Journalists as Scientists," journalists tend to operate according to implicit theories of action and causality—a "voluntaristic theory of action," especially emphasizing the actions of prominent business and political leaders, and an emphasis on singular "events" over long-term processes—that embody a worldview inherently in opposition to the dominant structural/historical thrust of the social sciences.

One could even argue that a good deal of journalism aimed at achieving the democratic elitist or "watchdog" goal of interrogating power—the kind of journalism, for instance, that wins "Pulitzer Prizes" in the United States—falls short

[9] Public journalism, as promoted by Jay Rosen and others, is of course not the only way to promote deliberative democracy and it can perhaps be justly criticized for promoting "community" without adequately taking into account the very real power dynamics that serve to stifle truly free and open debate. "Traditional" journalists, however, tended to oppose public journalism on the basic grounds that it was effectively a form of "advocacy" journalism and thus eroded the sacred principle of separating fact and opinion. See, e.g., Mark Fitzgerald, "Decrying public journalism," *Editor & Publisher*, November 11, 1995, p. 20; Michael Gartner, "Public journalism—Seeing through the gimmicks," *Media Studies Journal*, Winter 1997, p. 69–73; Mohamed El-Bendary, "Enough feel-good journalism," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 1999, p. 11; E.F. Porter, "Rosen's civic journalism counter to good journalism," *The St. Louis Journalism Review*, December 1999/January 2000, p. 18. Despite withdrawal of funding support by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism in 2003, the public journalism "movement" has endured and continues to be controversial within journalistic circles.

of its full democratic potential. That argument certainly goes against the grain of journalistic conventional wisdom, but it is precisely the claim made by David Simon, the former *Baltimore Sun* reporter who went on to create and write HBO's acclaimed dramatic series "The Wire." In the final episodes of The Wire, which focus directly on an urban newspaper modeled on the *Sun*, Simon takes aim not just at journalistic mediocrity but at what has come to pass for journalistic excellence. In a profile about Simon that recently appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Lanahan 2008: 26), Simon criticizes the standard formula for winning Pulitzer Prizes: "Surround a simple outrage, overreport it, claim credit for breaking it, make sure you find a villain, then claim you effected change as a result of your coverage. Do it [all] in a five-part series... " In contrast to narrative-driven stories with "good guys and bad guys," Simon calls for in-depth reporting that emphasizes the systemic complexity of social problems. Unfortunately, Simon argues, journalists tend to focus on the symptoms rather than the causes:

> You can carve off a symptom and talk about how bad drugs are, and you can blame the police department for fucking up the drug war, but that's kind of like coming up to a house hit by a hurricane and making a lot of voluminous notes about the fact that some of the roof tiles are off (quoted in Lanahan 2008: 28).

If such "symptomatic" coverage is often the best that journalism has to offer, then clearly greater journalistic autonomy is not an adequate solution to the problems of the press and the public.[10] Just as financiers did not act in the best interests of the economy when left by a deregulating state to their own devices in recent years, journalists as well as other public sphere actors also are likely to need incentives and constraints that further public interest ends. There is no way around it: necessary constraints and incentives come from the democratic political system itself, as expressed through the lawmaking and regulatory operations of the state. And yet, Bourdieu has surprisingly little to say about the state and media policy. In his writings on the media, Bourdieu assumes state and market power are allied, when in fact in many cases they are not.[11] This is all the more surprising given the substantial ways that the French state seeks to counter market control over the media, including a large public television sector and among the most generous press subsidies in the western world (Benson 2005a). Just to cite one example: if philosophers have made their presence felt on French television in a way impossible to imagine elsewhere (Chapin 2007), it is in large part due to the support and encouragement of the French state. Content-neutral government subsidies to support "ideological diversity" have also helped keep alive critical journalistic voices on the left (the communist *L'Humanité*, the left-leaning *Libération*, the left-Catholic *La Croix*) and even the far

[10] There are exceptions, of course, from this tendency toward narrow symptomatic news coverage: for example, multi-article series in *The New York Times* on such complex topics as class, race, and immigration.

[11] I do not think that this problem is inherent in field theory, as Gisele Sapiro (2003) clearly shows in her analysis of the literary field "between the state and the market" (see also Benson 1999, 2004, 2006). It should also be emphasized that even at the emergence of a semi-autonomous journalistic field in France in the 1870s and 1880s, state laws and regulations played a role in limiting direct political intervention and legitimizing the professional role of the journalist.

right (the National Front's *Présent*) that might have disappeared if left to the sole verdict of the market.

For his part, Habermas is quick to condemn any media system incompletely differentiated from the political system. He not only attacks the extreme case of media under Berlusconi's Italy (an easy target!), but also criticizes the supposed "paternalism" of the Italian public service model that preceded Berlusconi (precisely the media system favorably compared, though not without some reservations, with the U.S. media in the aforementioned study by Hallin and Mancini [1984]). And yet the evidence is growing that it is precisely those media systems that are more closely intertwined with political systems—that is, linked to political parties and other political groupings in society (or in the U.S., the more alternative political media)—that produce the kind of news and commentary that most closely approximate the ideals of deliberative democracy (for evidence, see Rohlinger 2007). If it is true that western European press systems often provide more reasoned, critical debate and ideological diversity than one finds in the hyper-commercialized U.S. media (see, Hallin and Mancini 2004; Benson and Hallin 2007), it is not an accident or simply a product of European "civilization": it is due to the state, both in the way it is organized (via multi-party parliamentary systems) and in its level of (anti-market) intervention in the media sector.

To bring in one interesting commentary on this point, Jeffrey Alexander (1981) compares the historical development of the French and American press, and in general, staunchly defends the virtues of the more "differentiated" American media against the less de-differentiated French press—less de-differentiated, that is, vis-à-vis the political system. However, Alexander (1981: 35) also makes this important concession:

> Theorists from Aristotle to Marx and Weber have emphasized that the achievement of intellectual insight proceeds most effectively along a dialectical path, through a head-on dialogue of opposing perspectives. It appears that the conditions for such a dialogue occur only in those societies in which the news media is less rather than more differentiated [that is, less differentiated from the political system], for only in relatively undifferentiated situations do the mediums produce sharply divergent perspectives of public events ....

On the other hand, Alexander continues, the higher the media differentiation—as in the case of the United States—the lower the "sharpness of public thought and the quality of intellectual insight available to the society at large" (Alexander 1981). Alexander goes on to note that this problem is due not only to American journalism, but to the structure of the American political system as well. To be fair, then, it is not just a question of the media; however, media policy and the level of politicization of the media are clearly factors shaping the "quality" of public sphere debate.

In his contribution to a volume I edited, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field,* Michael Schudson (2005) offers a powerful critique of any simple defense of journalistic autonomy. He even-handedly notes that journalism in democratic societies must remain open to a variety of external influences, both market and political (as well as academic and activist). But I would suggest that the problem of journalistic autonomy is a bit more lopsided. It is clear that journalism today has lost most of its autonomy vis-à-vis the market. The flip side of this, though, is that

journalism has gained too much autonomy vis-à-vis the democratic state—that is, the state acting on behalf of various publics to defend and promote forms of journalism that are currently underproduced by market forces. The question, then, is how do we right this imbalance?

In sum, Bourdieu makes an important contribution by showing how reform can arise from within institutionalized fields in or near the "center" rather than only at the lifeworld "periphery." He also calls attention to the ways in which the struggle for "autonomy" within cultural fields helps explain discursive outcomes. Yet it is an open rather than a settled question whether such autonomy most effectively assures the furtherance of democratic ends. Both Bourdieu and Habermas call for greater journalistic autonomy, yet given their broader social analyses, neither complete journalistic autonomy from civil society or the scientific academy would be seen as a worthy goal. In the face of increasing market penetration (or "colonization" in Habermas's terms), it is crucial for the public sphere not only to resist such commercializing pressure but to also promote diverse non-journalistic as well as journalistic voices. State intervention on behalf of public as well as journalistic interests has in fact occurred repeatedly in the "creation" or "expansion" of public spheres, and it could be made to happen again in support of media reform efforts. But in order for it to happen again, it must first be recognized as a possibility. This is where the new institutionalism in media sociology can help.

New Institutionalism and the State

To finish out this survey of the "new" media sociology, I argue in this section that new institutionalism—in dialogue with Habermas and Bourdieu—offers the best means both of empirically specifying the public sphere and just as importantly suggesting how the public sphere can work better to achieve democratic ideals.

By new institutionalist media research, I mean such works as Timothy Cook's (1998) *Governing with the News* and Bartholomew Sparrow's (1999) *Uncertain Guardians*. I would also include under this rubric Hallin and Mancini's (2004) *Comparing Media Systems*, even though they do not draw as extensively on the general new institutionalist literature (e.g., Dimaggio and Powell 1991) as do Cook and Sparrow. Finally, I would include the recent book by Paul Starr (2004), *The Creation of the Media*.[12] Starr's entire narrative of the creation of the U.S. media is infused with the new institutionalist insight that market structures are shaped by state policies. And thus, according to Starr, the particular shape of the U.S. media market can only be understood in light of policy choices that political actors have made at critical junctures in U.S. history. There is nothing inevitable about the current structure of U.S. media. It could have been otherwise. In short, the new institutionalists help us see what is sorely lacking in many analyses of the public sphere and the journalistic field[13]: the State.

[12] See also Kaplan (2002), Hughes (2006), and the essays and research articles collected in the special issue of *Political Communication* (volume 23, number 2, 2006) devoted to "new institutionalism and the news" edited by David Ryfe (2006).

[13] Of course, many new institutionalists share with Bourdieu an emphasis on "strategic action" within fields (see Noy 2008) which are governed by a certain degree of internal homogeneity (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) about the implicit or explicit "rules of the game".

Though not using the new institutionalist vocabulary, Michael Schudson (1994: 534) powerfully makes this same point in one of his lesser known (but arguably most important) essays:

> Habermas writes that citizens act as a public 'when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion'. This is a normative ideal. But there is no such situation. ... There is no free-form discussion, no functioning debate that does not operate within a normative structure accepted *as binding* [my italics]. Indeed, for serious consideration of matters of general interest in a conversation or a parliament, explicit or implicit ground rules, written or taken for granted, must be operating.

In other words, the state must be "brought back in," Schudson concludes. Starr's study in fact provides ample documentation of the myriad ways in which the state has helped to establish such "binding" rules—even, and especially, in the United States where a First Amendment fundamentalism has tended to obscure the state's role historically. Starr notes that early in the nineteenth century "while the Europeans taxed publications, the United States subsidized the growth of independent newspapers through cheap postal rates" (Starr 2004: 16). By 1850, through its education, tax, intellectual property, and postal policies, American government helped assure a higher rate of literacy (with the exception of Sweden), more affordable access to a wider range of books and newspapers, greater protections of citizen privacy, and greater transparency in governmental policy-making and administration than existed anywhere in Europe (Starr 2004: 105). Rajagopal (2006) sees this U.S. history as a clear break with Europe: whereas European public spheres emerged organically in opposition to (feudal) states and that these states at least initially sought to reign in and suppress emerging public spheres, the U.S. public sphere was arguably a state-driven political project from the start. While an important historical point, it is important to stress that today contemporary democratic public spheres on both sides of the Atlantic are crucially shaped by government policies. The key questions today (both for research and political action) concern the extent and purpose of such shaping—whether they will be along the laissez-faire principles that have tended to emerge triumphant in the U.S. (and which are mostly presented uncritically by Starr) or along the non-commercial, public service principles that have dominated in Europe, especially since the end of World War II (see Benson 2005b).

Is the role of the state moot in the age of the internet? While it is surely true that the social organization of the media and its relations with diverse publics is complicated by the internet, it is highly debatable whether this has led to a postmodern disintegration or dispersal of power. Social theorists of technology-driven "networks" such as Castells (1996) and Latour (2005) provide new conceptual tools to investigate the empirical organization of increasingly complex public spheres. However, as with all social theory, we should treat their claims as hypotheses to be tested rather than final verdicts. And while the internet surely enables new forms of democratic public engagement, there is already considerable empirical evidence that old media patterns are reappearing or even being accentuated on the web, such as the continued dominance of a handful of large media conglomerates (McChesney 1999), narrow "homogeneity" (Boczkowski and de

Santos 2007) and scoop-driven "sensationalism" (Fenton 2009) of media content, and audience tendencies to gravitate to non-political content (Dahlgren 2001). There is little reason to believe that laissez-faire will work differently online than it has offline.

In this regard, legal scholar C. Edwin Baker's (2002) analysis shows that there are alternatives to relying solely on the market (or to using the state, as Starr's account emphasizes, primarily to help jump-start markets). Baker argues that states have a role and an obligation to intervene where markets fail—such as in providing an adequate amount of reporting on controversial or complex social problems, or news about the poor and the working class. Such information and commentary, generally offensive or not of interest to advertisers and high-disposable income audiences, is nevertheless crucial to the functioning of a democratic society. Is such a path possible in the hyper-commercialized United States? Starr is skeptical. Once an institutional path has been chosen, for good or ill, it is difficult to get off of it (see also Bernhard Peters's [1997] view that national public spheres are powerfully constrained by the weight of historical tradition, or what he termed "public culture"[14]). What works in Europe may or may be not transposable to the American situation, given their different historical trajectories and traditions. Yet Starr's emphasis on moments of constitutive "choices" also calls attention to the intermittent possibility of transformation. Whether or not new less-market oriented directions in U.S. media policy are desirable (depending on one's own politics), the current economic crisis may indeed constitute a new "constitutive" moment when such new directions are at least possible. Fundamentally reshaping the American public sphere cannot be simply ruled out as politically "unrealistic."

Conclusion: Varieties of Media Reform

At the moment of this writing, many of America's leading newspapers are on the verge of disappearing. Indeed, the *Rocky Mountain News* has already closed its doors, while others, such as the *Christian Science Monitor* or the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* are shifting to smaller online-only operations. The owner of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* has filed for bankruptcy. The *Boston Globe* is on the brink of bankruptcy, and its owner, The New York Times Company, only survives grace of a multi-billion dollar loan from Mexican telecommunications tycoon Slim Helú. This crisis extends across the western industrialized world[15] and

[14] Because Peters (1999: 185) sees "a collective idea of belonging to a public discussing common themes and problems" drawing on "general cultural interpretations and self-understandings" as an important precondition for the existence of an effectively operating public sphere (setting aside the question of whether it achieves various democratic normative goals), he is skeptical of the possibility of an international or even European-wide public sphere. However, see Calhoun (2002), for a thoughtful analysis of a potentially emerging "European" public sphere, and Serra (2000), for a fascinating portrait of the formation of an international public sphere in response to human rights protests in Brazil during the early 1990s.

[15] For evidence of the growing press crisis in North America and western Europe, see, e.g., IFJ (2006), WAN (2007), and Fenton (2009).

is due to the restructuring of the industry related to the shift to online platforms and the precipitous decline in advertising exacerbated by the world financial crisis starting in 2008.

But what to do about it? As John Nichols and Robert McChesney write in an impassioned and persuasive essay in *The Nation* (2009): "Regrettably the loud discussion of the collapse of journalism has been far stronger in describing the symptoms than in providing remedies. With the frank acknowledgement that the old commercial system has failed and will not return, there has been a flurry of modest proposals to address the immodest crisis." Both substantial proposals and clarity of purpose are needed.

In this regard, it seems that Habermas has had a recent change of mind about the merits of state intervention, though the specific contours of such intervention are not specified. In an article for the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Habermas (2007) writes: "From a historical point of view, there is something counter-intuitive in the idea of reigning in the market's role in journalism and the press. The market was the force that created the forum for subversive thoughts to emancipate themselves from state oppression in the first place." Habermas continues, in a vein familiar to readers of *Structural Transformation*: "Yet the market can fulfill this function only so long as economic principles do not infringe upon the cultural and political content that the market itself serves to spread. This is the kernel of truth at the core of Adorno's criticism of the cultural industry. Distrustful observation is called for, because no democracy can allow itself a market failure in this sector," and thus, government needs to step in to correct for this "market failure." But again, Habermas emphasizes, this is still "counter-intuitive" for many people—even those who agree that advertising and stock market censorship of the press are a serious problem. Thus, the first step, Habermas argues, is simply to help people "get used to the very idea of subsidizing newspapers and magazines."

The phrase "market failure" is key, and perhaps betrays Habermas's influence by C. Edwin Baker whom Habermas has had occasion to meet. Habermas, to his credit, continues to grow and learn from his critics.[16] He seems to be now moving beyond his insistence on journalistic self-regulation to directly address the need for state intervention. But what kind? How can state policies make a difference? Habermas does not answer these questions, nor should we necessarily look to him for the answers. They remain "on the table" for the next generation of media sociologists. Fortunately, both the quantity and quality of empirical studies of actually existing public spheres are increasing (see, e.g. Jacobs 2000; Perrin and Vaisey 2008; Davis 2009), offering important new insights. However, there is still precious little research (at least within the mainstream sociology journals or book series) that can be directly deployed to guide policy-making, that is, the actual shaping and re-shaping of the public sphere.

[16] In his 2006 *Communication Theory* essay, Habermas seems to also have been influenced by Bourdieu when he analyzes forms of power as forms of "capital," even specifically referencing "cultural capital" (418–419). While Habermas's flexibility and openness are admirable, it is not enough to simply expand one's conceptual vocabulary. The sum of these "ad hoc" adjustments doesn't quite yet add up to a coherent model.

What would media sociology in support of media reform look like? In my view, it should not be wedded in advance to any political agenda, but it should systematically challenge what we think we know (but really do not, conclusively) about what promotes and what undermines various democratic normative goals. While no methodological approach would be excluded, this kind of ambitious research program will likely emphasize macro- more than micro-approaches, linking a broad range of data sources on structural characteristics of media outlets and systems with sophisticated, theory-driven content analyses of text and image samples drawn from electronic news archives whose reach across time and space has only begun to be tapped (see, e.g., Snow et al. 2007; Wessler 2008b; Benson 2009b; Page 1996). Qualitative studies can contribute to this project, though in-depth ethnographies of single news organizations are increasingly being replaced by multi-site ethnographies (as in Boczkowski 2004) or in-depth interviews of hundreds of diverse informants located across various fields of cultural production (as in the recent book on the "field" of academic publishing by John Thompson [2005]). The new media sociology could start by seeking answers to such questions as the following:

Does concentration of media ownership always and necessarily lead to a degradation of media content, and if so, in what sense? Joshua Gamson and Pearl Latteier (2004) provocatively raise this question in their analysis of various types of media diversity, and Eric Klinenberg (2007) documents the effects of media concentration on local content diversity, but we still could use many more carefully-designed studies on this topic (see, e.g., Baker 2007). This question remains firmly on the table as some even now argue that increased concentration (e.g., allowing newspaper companies to own local television stations, or vice versa) is a solution to improving local journalism.

Second, what kinds of legally-sanctioned media ownership forms work the best to promote various democratic goals? Is it a coincidence, in fact, that a high proportion of the world's most respected newspapers have ownership structures that protect them from the most extreme commercial pressures? For instance, the *Guardian* in the UK, and both the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Germany are owned by trusts, *Le Monde* in France is majority owned by its journalists and other employees, and *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* are effectively controlled by their founding families via majority ownership of the voting stock shares. What is it about such non-conventional ownership structures that helps to promote quality journalism? And what kinds of legal frameworks might facilitate their wider adoption?

And a final crucial question: Under what conditions does state intervention either restrict or enable various forms of speech in the public sphere? What kinds of incentives, tax breaks, regulations, or subsidies are most effective in promoting either pluralist, deliberative, or elitist (watchdog) democratic ideals? How have national public spheres historically made room for non-journalist voices and perspectives, especially from civil society associations and the artistic and scientific fields? As Habermas notes, before such policies can be enacted in many countries and certainly in the United States, the widespread assumption that state intervention is necessarily detrimental to press freedom must first be overcome. My own comparative content analyses of the French and U.S. journalistic fields indicates that

despite greater state intervention in the French press, there is generally more ideological diversity, reasoned debate, and criticism of government and the dominant political parties than one finds in the U.S. press (see, e.g., Benson 2009b, c). These findings suggest that the question is not state or no state, but rather how different kinds of legal, bureaucratic, and political frameworks can help foster different kinds of journalism. In the case of France, I argue that a multi-party political system along with policies in support of ideologically diverse, less commercialized newspapers have helped to create the conditions for a "debate" rather than "narrative"-oriented journalism. But we need further multi-country studies that systematically test the effects, both positive and negative, of various types of government policies.

Finding a hearing for this research, and the policy solutions that might grow out of it, will continue to be a challenge—especially in the United States. The "good news" is that even in the U.S., journalists are openly considering non-profit and other policy reforms as never before. In a recent PBS documentary (Talbot 2007), then-*Los Angeles Times* editor Dean Bacquet expressed his enthusiasm for non-profit ownership models (such as the Poynter Institute's ownership of the *St. Petersburg* [Florida] *Times*, which would be similar to the Scott Trust's ownership of *The Guardian*). And in a recent op/ed essay published by *The New York Times*, two Yale investment officers made the case for tax policies that would allow endowments—similar to those used by universities—to underwrite quality journalism (Swensen and Schmidt 2009). Journalists are increasingly working with foundations and non-profits to seek policy solutions. One promising example is Free Press, a well-funded organization originally founded by Robert McChesney, John Nichols, and Josh Silver to combat media concentration, and which is now leading a policy initiative involving academics with activists, foundation leaders, and journalists to "Save Quality Journalism."[17] Another important project, "Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere," is being spearheaded by the Social Science Research Council, under the leadership of Craig Calhoun, and provides grants for sociologists and other media scholars to conduct research in concert with civil society organizations.[18]

Public or non-profit media are not the entire solution, of course. In service of "complex democracy," we need a complex mix of multiple types of small- and large-scale media. There is certainly a place for the kind of journalism produced by our best privately-owned media, which sometimes do achieve deliberative, watchdog, and pluralist ideals. Similarly, the internet is making possible new forms of democratic public expression previously unimaginable (Bennett 2003; Pickard 2008). But if history is any judge, leaving it all to the "wisdom" of the market or the everlasting promise of new technologies will not take us where we need to go.

In conclusion, if Bourdieu reminds us that emancipatory politics are constructed not found (as in the lifeworld), and new institutionalism calls our attention to state-led reform, we must return to Habermas and the normative debates he has inspired to help clarify the diverse purposes of media and how these might be institutionally secured. Habermas's normative influence (more than his specific empirical model, even in its new and improved version) helps clarify what is at stake, and what

[17] See http://www.freepress.net/media_issues/journalism.
[18] See http://programs.ssrc.org/media/.

precisely is being lost or gained relative to distinct democratic ideals. For too long, sociologists have taken the media as a virtual force of nature, as an obstacle that movements for social reform need to either adapt to or find a way around in pursuit of their goals. The present moment reveals another possibility: to transform the structure of the public sphere itself and thus make it a more supportive environment in which to pursue a range of democratic reformist goals. Or to put it another way: now, more than ever, the point of media sociology is not just to understand the public sphere, the point is to change it.

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