THE MAKING OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE: CLASS RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION IN THE UNITED STATES

HANNO HARDT

Introduction

The idea of the public sphere has occupied communication research and media studies in the United States at least since the early work of Jürgen Habermas which is represented by the publication of ***The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*** (issued in Germany in 1962, but not published in the United States until 1989). Its impact replaced older notions of the public and renewed interest in conceptualisations of public opinion that contributed to explanations of the political communication process. It is still particularly attractive to reform-minded American social scientists in pursuit of democratic ideals and media scholars in search of alternatives to a commercial system of public communication.

Past discussions of culture, media and society have yielded a specific, class-conscious understanding of the public sphere that marginalised or excluded working-class interests. Thus, questions of participation in the bourgeois public sphere, or about the historical conditions of a working-class public sphere, or the ways in which both, middle- and working-class experiences contribute to the making of an American culture are rarely at issue. Rather, conceptualisations of the public sphere in American cultural or communication studies represent yet another example of a specific, middle-class perspective on the making of a theoretical framework. The following observations address the historical conditions of constructing the American public sphere as a middle-class project.

This essay deals with the problem of the public sphere as a bourgeois conceptualisation and suggests that the

Hanno Hardt is Professor of communications at School of Journalism, University of Iowa, Iowa City, and Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva pl. 5, 1001 Ljubljana.

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failure of communication studies to consider the notion of class as a historical condition of the American social structure perpetuates and reinforces a dominant middle-class perception of media, work, and relations between media and society that marginalises working-class concerns and distorts the democratic vision of the public sphere.

The reception of Habermas' speculative notion of the public sphere grew into an intellectual cottage industry that produced a range of books and articles about the possibilities of a re-conceptualised, modern public sphere (Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1989, 1990; Hohendahl 1979; Peters 1993) which became the cornerstone of reformist writings on social relations in society and on the need for addressing the relationship between media and society (among others, Curran 1991, 1991a; Dahlgren 1987; Garnham 1990; Golding and Murdock 1991; Keane 1991; Kellner 1990; Lichtenberg 1990; Peters and Cmiel 1991). Many of these writings contained a new urgency that was based on the realisation that the spectre of political impotence, social marginalisation, and increased alienation, with their roots in a loss of access to power and participation in public affairs, was somehow related to the functioning of communication and the role of media in contemporary industrialised societies. Indeed, Habermas was celebrated as a potential source of explanation when it was argued that a "more catholic conception of (mass) communication, appreciative of its gloriously raucous as well as soberly informative qualities might make Habermas's theory of communication even more useful for theorists of the democratic role of the media" (Peters 1993, 567). Such theorists, however, also seem to submit without further discussion to the fact that Habermas addressed the rise of the public sphere in bourgeois society without acknowledging the presence of class conflicts or the possibility of an alternative working-class public sphere, which arose with the proliferation of organised labour, union activities, and the collective social life of the working class in the United States, or elsewhere. In fact, the subtitle of his book (1989) suggests that the "Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society" becomes the only category in subsequent discussions of the public sphere, in which the identification of the bourgeois public sphere through institutional sources of public opinion, like media, and the political realm, in general, purposefully restricts discussions about the public discourse of society.

On the other hand, it becomes quite appropriate for any extended discussion of communication in bourgeois society that media remain a legitimate concern in conceptualisations of the public sphere, when ownership and control of media technologies in the hands of corporations continue to be guided by industrial interests. Applying the idea of the "public" to media processes or practices becomes problematic and challenges the meaning of democracy and guarantees of a "public" discourse in the United States. For instance, Giles Gunn suggests that "even when the term 'public' can overcome the onus of privilege and exclusion it sometimes acquires, it nevertheless always implies selectivity." Indeed, "its monolithic nature is a myth and, like other mythic ideas, is highly susceptible to manipulation" (Gunn 1992, 216-217). For instance, because it may interfere with middle-class interests, as often argued by media critics, the term does not seem to raise more fundamental questions of working-class participation.

Such an oversight seems to relate to the failure of many contemporary writings to locate their analytical insights about the nature of the public sphere and political realities within a concrete historical moment. The meaning and content of the public sphere

rely on a specific social and cultural history of society; particularly, since the historical conditions of an enlightened European, or especially German **Bürgertum** and its experiences with independence and freedom during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were different from social and political developments in the United States, where production and economic growth evolved almost undisturbed by European traditions, like class consciousness and labour relations. For instance, in his preface to the American edition of ***The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*** Friedrich Engels observes that

> *American public opinion [in 1885] was almost unanimous on this one point: that there was no working class, in the European sense of the word, in America; that consequently no class struggle between workmen and capitalists, such as tore European society to pieces, was possible in the American republic; and that, therefore, socialism was a thing of foreign importation, which could never take root in American soil (Engels 1989, 489).*

Indeed, there have been widespread discussions concerning class and class differences in the United States during the nineteenth century with the growing realisation of social and economic differences in society; at the same time, there was an understanding of the unique American situation, in which ideas of upward mobility and co-operation between ownership and wage earners diluted the original, European tradition of class distinctions. More fundamentally, there was no clear agreement over the meaning of class, according to Martin J. Burke, who concludes his study of "contested interpretations" of class and class relations with the observation that "When, where, how, and why Americans wrote and spoke about classes involved institutional and ideological exercises of cultural and political power," resulting in diversity and disagreement (Burke 1995, 165).

In fact, the fundamental difference between developments in the United States and Europe manifests itself in the shifting relationships between state and society, that is, between an increasing encroachment of the state on society and a growing disengagement of society from the state. These were American and European experiences, respectively, which would produce different conditions for public discourse and result in quite particular definitions of the public sphere. In addition, notions of community surface in American social and political theory and provide yet another, more specific relationship between private and public practices based on knowledge and communication; for instance, the work of John Dewey (1927), attempts to overcome problems of industrialisation and urbanisation through a return to issues of communication and participation, which inform the ideas and ideals of a Great Community. Consequently, distinct understandings of the role of individualism and personal choice, the intervention and privilege of industrial concerns, and subsequent definitions of participation helped shape a different notion of the public sphere in the American political practice. At the same time, these were pure reflections of American middle-class concerns, expressions of optimism, or of a utopian spirit that characterise progressive social thought earlier this century. There was no room for an independent working-class culture, although it existed throughout this period of American history.

Thus, the present dilemma of conceptualising an ideal public sphere is linked to an understanding of theoretical concepts like communication, participation and democracy and their origins in the cultural, political, and economic history of the United

States. By exploring their specific historical conditions, questions about the American public sphere as a bourgeois construction of the contemporary cultural reality will emerge to challenge the conceptual premises of media studies.

Technology, Democracy and Participation

In the field of media studies, ideas of access to the means of communication which inform definitions of participation, and the rise of the media in their social and political functions that describe practices in the public sphere are based on comprehending the historical relationship between technology and democracy, in particular. The United States holds the distinction of having invented, mastered, and propagated the merger between technological advancement and democratic practices long before other, particularly European societies, had fully grasped the meaning of this relationship during the 1920s. "Mass" communication and the impact of popular culture played a major role in the negotiation of the social and political definition of progress and its circulation in American society, while the European confrontation with the machine was also articulated in the intellectual context of merging (oppositional) political goals and artistic expressions. Thus, considerations of media technologies also belonged to the cultural sphere.

The American success of integrating technology into society became a model for Europeans as early as the 1920s, only to be interrupted by World War II. Radio, film, and the automobile, in particular, expanded the intellectual and physical horizons of individuals and liberated them from the tyranny of localism. This process was accompanied by the notion of "Americanism," which was an acknowledgement of the successful application of technology to the making of a modern version of democracy. It allowed for freedom of movement, speech, and beliefs within a social, economic, and political framework that was marked by the results of industrialisation, which symbolised an auspicious shift of economic power. Thus, the success of Americanism and Fordism was also an indication of a historical epoch in which relations of production changed, based on "an inherent necessity to achieve organisation of a planned economy," which would replace the old vestiges of feudalism in Europe, according to Antonio Gramsci (1971, 279). Such observations during the 1920s were not only a typical consequence of the celebration of technological advancements; they were also observations about the **process** of industrialisation and the rise of a commercial mentality which ultimately accounted for major changes in the appearance, structure, and experience of American society, including a growing working class. But the preoccupation with technological innovations and the celebration of industrialisation also displaced the concerns of the working class over the control of the means of production. Instead, much was made of the potential liberation of working men and women and their mobility under improved economic conditions.

Thus, the evolution and confirmation of private interests energised the development of the press, and the subsequent emergence of new public media (e.g., film, radio, and television) was typically identified with the commercial rather than the social or cultural realm of society which remained a source of intellectual and critical thought about the allegiances and responsibilities of the media. Indeed, the press prospered as a private enterprise which had joined the marketplace and operated, much as any other industrial concern, for profit and expansion. Most importantly, however, the industrialisation of communication was a middle-class success which catered to

middle-class aspirations, tastes, and material preferences and served as a model for subsequent developments of societal communication in the United States and elsewhere.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States had moved ahead of its European competitors in the production of steel and oil which, together with the automobile industry a few years later, became of central importance to the economy. The growth of cities, fuelled by prospects of real prosperity and the potential of moving up into a middle- class existence, contributed to the wide-spread optimism among people that anyone could make it in America. At that time, Americans opted for economic prosperity, and capitalism became the preferred context for the rapid and uncontrolled industrialisation of society. Although a rising wave of social criticism articulated the consequences of the American dream, individuals did not argue with success, especially when industrial development created affluence and satisfied the dreams of millions of new and old immigrants, many members of the working class shared conservative ideals of middle-class existence. Some joined the middle class, while others are still preoccupied with the dream after two or three generations of hard work and rising frustration. This view of American mobility became the official ideology which relied on economic and political power to bring about democratic solutions to relations among people. Aronowitz (1992, 25) observes that the "American popular, as well as sociological, imagination remains solidly infused with the idea that America is set off from all other societies, virtually, by the opportunities it affords for vertical mobility." While one result has been the emergence of status as the popular and social scientific category of location, its economic and political consequences have also produced definitions of communication and participation that are closely tied to the dominance of the middle class.

The Rise of the Middle Class in America

During the nineteenth century, middle classness became the essence of American society; it has remained a formidable cultural territory, the root cause of anxiety among politicians and the permanent goal of each cycle of immigrants and the otherwise disadvantaged and forgotten people. The potential of economic success and personal advancement, and the promises of middle-class status, became a feature of political and commercial crusades that penetrated religious groups, ethnic minorities, and urban and rural communities alike.

It was a remarkable crusade of commercial interests, guided by the desire for stability and security which characterises middle-class existence. Although the same middle class earlier had recognised the power of revolutions, it was not to turn into a revolutionary class itself. Instead, it shared the values of commerce, that is, devotion to property, acquisition of wealth, and the maintenance of social status and mobility. Government policies supported these activities and, generally, protected the interests of capitalism, the "foster child of the special interests," according to Woodrow Wilson, who also identified the "big manufacturers, the big masters of commerce, the heads of railroad corporations and of steamship corporations" as the "masters of the government" (Wilson 1913, 57-58). Their success, however, was not only based on the political practices of government, but also on the positive predisposition of American workers towards capitalism.

Observations from abroad were particularly clear on issues related to the working-

class experience in the United States, because commerce and industry could safely ignore the class consciousness of the working class as an obstacle on the path to profits and economic expansion. Werner Sombart, a German political economist, observed in 1906 that "emotionally the American worker has a share of capitalism: I believe that he loves it. Anyway, he devotes his entire body and soul to it. If there is anywhere in America where the restless striving after profit, the complete fruition of the commercial drive and the passion for business are indigenous, it is in the worker, who wants to earn as much as his strength will allow, and to be as unrestrained as possible" (Sombart 1976, 20). Another German social theorist, Wilhelm H. Riehl, suggested in his 1861 work on civil society that theoretical considerations of working class existence are limited to the "Old World." He concluded, that once "a proletarian arrives in the New World, where there is as yet no historic society in the process of disintegration, he abandons all theoretical questions about this social existence and once more simply attempts to exist unreflectively — at least if he does not intend to go hungry" (Riehl 1990, 255). Such sentiments of the working class, however, were in contrast to the total exploitation of the worker, who, according to Sombart (1976, 112), was "lacerated in the harness of capitalism or has to work himself so quickly to death as in America."

Upton Sinclair, a contemporary American observer, formulated his own assessment of the American middle class in terms of "an organised system of repression" and suggests that "in the world of ideas it has the political platform, the school, the college, the press, the church — and literature. The bourgeois controls these things precisely as he controls the labour of society, by his control of the purse-strings" (Sinclair 1907, 252). These institutions produced a crusade that was meant to reinforce the ideas of the dominant class as universal ideas among people, who were engaged in their own drive for a better life, additional opportunities for personal growth, and middle-class prestige.

At the same time, however, the rise of modernism in the United States had created a generation of intellectuals and artists who offered creative alternatives to the authority of conventions with their acceptance of alienation as a condition of existence on the margins of bourgeois society (Bradbury and McFarlane 1976; Crunden 1993). Yet, there was no lasting effect of such an elitist stance, which considered politics suspect and reality debatable. Instead, the press as a middle-class institution, conquered the public arena and celebrated the authority of the fact; it responded to its own perception of the power of public opinion and collaborated in the boosterism of American values by reflecting middle-class beliefs and reinforcing a middle-class perspective on the world without significant critical opposition. Consequently, the interests of business penetrated the working-class consciousness with assertions about commerce and industry as genuine sources of personal prosperity and a good life. In any event, participation in consumption promised status and commercial propaganda effectively dispersed potential resistance to consumerism as a way of life.

For instance, advertising in the form of colourful trade cards depicted the lifestyle of a middle class and celebrated technological progress as personal achievement. Sombart (1976, 112), who addresses the psychological influence on the worker to think that "he was not an enemy of the capitalist system but even a promoter of it," argues that inducements were provided by a system of financial rewards and personal acknowledgements for contributions to the improvement of industrial processes. Like-

wise, Gramsci (1971, 286) suggests later in the 1920s that the change to a "new type of man suited to a new type of work and productive process" was still "at the stage of psycho-physical adaptation to the new industrial structure, aimed for through high wages."

These observations also foreshadowed the potential self-destruction of the American working-class consciousness; it negated itself by rejecting the conditions under which it was formed to embrace technology as an expression of progress only to lose its identity and sense of place when work became an externalised function. Among the results of this process of transformation was a form of participation that was entirely based on an individual contribution, if not sacrifice of knowledge and working skills to serve technological or industrial progress and industrial efficiency without the experience of work as personal involvement. It was grounded in a historical situation in which, according to Gramsci (1971, 286), "American workers unions are, more than anything else, the corporate expression of the rights of qualified crafts and therefore the industrialists' attempts to curb them have a certain 'progressive' aspect." Consequently, there was neither empowerment nor control over the means of production. Instead, participation evolved into a social practice that was rooted in the ideas of capitalism which directed the material interests of workers along a path of economic and social inequality. Max Weber once noted that although individual conduct is governed not by ideas, but by material and ideal interests, "very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic interest" (Weber 1946, 280). Indeed, that "dynamic interest" has continued to guide social and political thought which remains preoccupied with the fate of the middle class as the ultimate fulfilment of the American promise. It produced a social and cultural context for definitions of equity, fairness, or participation that now effect contemporary issues of democratisation and, therefore, readings of the potential of a political public sphere without regard for the existence of the working class, which represents the concerns of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Since the late nineteenth century, when a climate of economic expansion, industrial growth, and personal entrepreneurship predominated in the United States, the interests of business and industry have prevailed over expressions of social consciousness and public welfare to dictate content and direction of the American civilisation. The realm of culture, specifically the field of media practices, contributed through accommodation and compromise to the success of commercial interests. In fact, "industrial culture rests on the industrialisation of culture," according to Norman Birnbaum (1969, 113), who also suggests that "a system of symbols, of consciousness, of sensibility, of preconscious and unconscious meanings, has been assimilated to the imperatives of machine production, market organisation, and bureaucratic power."

For instance, industrialisation in the United States was accompanied by a surrender of political power which changed into the hands of business and was administered by politicians, whose allegiance to progress and economic strength outweighed social considerations; few contemplated the rules of capitalism which rewarded economic success, but responded to social concerns with paternalistic gestures. Thus, problems such as unemployment, welfare, and even poverty and illness, were recast in terms of personal shortcomings rather than being considered the result of societal problems by those entrenched in the traditional attitudes of a business community, in

which the strong survived and the weak were cast aside. Consequently, the idea that poverty was a sign of idleness, even a sin, was the reflection of a popular conservative notion that haunted nineteenth century America; it continued into this century, recently visible in the media coverage of political reactions to social legislation, like social security and health care, despite the advancements made in social legislation and welfare. It reflects a deeply held belief in the American spirit, which replaces ideas of class and class consciousness with a doctrine of equal rights and equal opportunity.

The result was a discernible blind spot in American public life, where the response to the need to assist others in the pursuit of employment, education, or good health, was reduced to a litany of private goals or expectations of the dominant representations of the middle class, including personal qualifications. Progressivism recognised inequality, yet continued operating within the political and economic system and was content with recognising and deploring aberration. There was a growing reluctance, if not refusal, to share any burden or responsibility in the interest of the common good. In fact, the idea of the common good seemed to hold up best in the context of national crises or emergencies, called upon by political or spiritual leaders, when a way of life was threatened and authoritative assurances were sought to protect the social and economic status quo of the middle class. Under these circumstances, public willingness to surrender rights and responsibilities to a central institution, e.g., the state or the church, increased in defence of the dominant class interests.

Despite declining political power, the middle class became the major target and primary reference group for commerce and industry. Buying power and the potential of a sizeable market for consumer goods guaranteed yet another form of participation in the affairs of modern society, this time through the shared experience of consumption. Marketing and advertising created and appealed to the need for self-confidence, physical well-being, and mobility in a consumer society, while politics offered a rationale for consumption as participation in the political process. Both appealed to feelings and implied that individual happiness and the well-being of the national economy were identical goals. Again, the notion of participation emerged in this context as an invitation to share in the values of a free market ideology and to identify personal aspirations with the political goals of society.

The Press and the Industrialisation of Culture

The activities of the American popular press were located at the centre of these developments which involved the interests of a growing middle class at the expense of other concerns involving the working class, for instance. Since the press represents the possibilities of enlightenment and continuous education about society, including class relations and conflicts, its practices are significant historical markers in tracing the nature of the public sphere and its inclusiveness of social and cultural diversity. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the expansion of the newspaper business marked the conclusion of a major shift from a political press, with its peculiar, often personal agendas, party loyalty, and individual editorial leadership to a market orientation, which focused on the commodification of news, supported business interests of their owners, and reflected the structural changes of industrialisation that had led to commercial consolidation. The future of the twentieth century press was marked by a succession of mergers and closures of newspapers and the rise of the "one-newspaper town" in the United States. A. J. Liebling (1975, 60) talks about the "end-of-a-

newspaper story (which) has become one of the commonplaces of our time, and schools of journalism are probably giving courses in how to write one: the gloom-fraught city room, the typewriters hopelessly tapping out stories for the last edition, the members of the staff cleaning out their desks and wondering where the hell they are going to go." It was a significant change to a "new" journalism which, according to Schudson (1992, 153), became the "antithesis of association or community;" it also narrowed the potential of the public sphere and strengthened a press of middle-class interests, less involved in the political discourse of the community of readers, and more committed to strategies of profitability and economic survival. The neglect of the community at large at the expense of class differences, ethnic diversity, social conflict, and the potential of widespread participation in public discourse created a press, which is more committed to popularity than to accountability.

For instance, James Lemert (1984) has explained that the contemporary commercial press avoided "mobilising information" that directs attention to controversial activities, while presenting patriotic and unifying material. In addition, the American press was plagued by the homogeneity of the intelligentsia, which directed and identified with media practices that reflected their ideological uniformity, according to Noam Chomsky (1979, 9), who had earlier determined that "the mass media are almost one hundred percent 'state capitalist'." This left many readers — and therefore parts of the community — in search for ways to locate and participate in social or political practices that were controversial and unpopular by the standards of the media and challenged the established political system. The problems of the working class vis-à-vis commercial or industrial interests, the changing relations of production, and the dilemma of organised labour remain major unexplored topics of social and political significance. Thus, while the press confirmed and reinforced its representation of commercial interests, the influence of the total community was further diminished by a prevailing social and political structure that sought to relegate public interests to issues of consumption, making them middle-class concerns. By doing so, the media excluded the working class, which is typically not conceptualised in terms of consumption, but distinguishes itself socially and culturally through other values that emerge from its sense of community, like family relations.

Therefore, the problem of access to the public sphere, that is, the lack of diverse opinions and perspectives and the failure of a responsive press, cannot be solved by appealing to what has been called "public" journalism. Without freedom of individual practices, the power and responsibility of professional journalists is severely restricted; they are not representatives of diversity and were never independent historical agents of change in the American media system. Instead, they have been subordinate to editors or managers of the press and lack autonomy. Perhaps they share a position of modern intellectuals which Gorz (1976) has defined as belonging neither to the working class nor to the power structure, but to the dominant capitalist system. The ownership of the press, on the other hand, prevails with an autonomous understanding of freedom that is based on invoking property rights in pursuit of its own goals; it controls not only content but throughout the history of American media has interfered with the organisation and activities of newsworkers. Thus, working-class interests surface in the organisation of media activities and become a relevant topic of social and historical research.

More specifically, the conditions of contemporary newsroom work are by and large

an outcome of the history of labour-management relations in the industry. The organisation of workers and the history of labour unions in the United States provide an excellent case study of the erosion of political power and the demise of a public role for the working class. As early as the nineteenth century, the power of organised labour dissipated or was redirected to help accomplish the process of industrialisation. Consequently, the goals of the business community became the goal of the working class, whose sense of solidarity dissolved, while its fading class consciousness was replaced by a belief in the prosperity of a middle-class existence. The latter became a public objective of securing what Gramsci (1971, 12) has called a "spontaneous" consent by the masses "to the general direction imposed on social life" by those representing the dominant group.

Thus, from the very beginning, labour disputes were never widely supported actions; they were seen as the local or regional response to a specific issue, or the expression of a grievance, rather than the ideological battle over control of the workplace, the rights of workers, and the responsibilities of employers. There were strikes, there were committed union members, and there were concessions. However, the story of unions was rarely a story of working-class victories; it still is, instead, a story of accommodation and compromise at the expense of freedom and control over their own destiny, when the promise of affluence became a more important event than the long-range consequences of industrialisation for workers and their union activities.

The press had no effective labour representation of its work force, except among printers. Journalists were treated as newsworkers, whose middle-class background or ambitions were deflected despite promises of professionalism, and ultimately squashed by the social and economic realities of newswork. They were producers of news stories, with serious constraints on the use of language, style, and content of their reports. Newsworkers had virtually no chance to act freely and independently in the typical fashion of intellectual workers. Even those who organised in the American Newspaper Guild formed their union outside the ideological goals of the working class. Daniel Leab (1970) reports about the reluctance of journalists to join a trade union or be identified with a non-professional workforce, although forming a professional organisation seemed a reasonable goal for most editorial workers. A more radical view, like Sinclair's (1936, 421) idea of "one organisation of all men and women who write, print, and distribute news to take control and see to it that the newspapers serve public interests" was initially rejected.

By and large, newsworkers remain utterly dependent upon media management and create a paradox in American journalism by working within a definition of freedom of the press that belonged to press owners rather than to the independent and professional practices of journalists. Instead, newsworkers face an anti-labour and pro-business climate that silences their own voices, but rewards compliance with the rules of corporate journalism and their submission to public interests claimed by the press. Such interests, for instance, are the interests of the business community which lead to public discussion of union activities by openly anti-union newspapers. News reports focus on violence rather than on issues and on cases of unlawful behaviour and loss of control, rather than on the orderly process of civic protest. Unfortunately, there is no history of a major labour or leftist press in the United States capable of using its own political interests to balance the views of the business elites and refute the non-partisan claims of the mainstream media. On the other hand, there is a distinguished his-

tory of an organised left-wing critique of the social and political conditions of American society. Publications, ranging from the Daily Worker to journals like ***The Liberator, The New Masses, The Nation, The New Republic***, and ***The Partisan Review***, especially during the 1920s and 1930s, and ***The National Guardian***, since the late 1940s, reflected the intellectual and political commitment of American writers to the socialist cause. Max Eastman's challenge to writers characterise the spirit of this involvement in the cause for justice and freedom. "Your place ... is with the working people in their fight for more life than it will benefit capital to give them; your place is the working-class struggle; your word is Revolution" (Aaron 1961, 41).

Yet, agonising over the conditions of the working class did not produce immediate changes, nor was the mainstream press attracted by a radical view of society and the conditions of working people. Indeed, anti-labour attitudes among newspapers remained wide-spread, making Liebling (1975, 170) worry "for the newspapers' sake, about their custom of ruling, in every strike, that labour is wrongheaded, as if they were a panel of arbitrators appointed by a High Power." The result has been a public image of organised labour and union activities that fits the narratives of commerce and industry in their efforts to discredit and reject unionisation. It has been labelled an un-American practice, with particular references to foreign-born labour leaders and identified with the activities of anarchists or the Communist party. For instance, Engels (1989, 495) realised by the end of the nineteenth century that the predominance of foreign-born socialists among them was unacceptable to Americans and suggested that they "become out and out American" in order to succeed in uniting the American working class.

Patricia Sexton has chronicled the periods surrounding both World Wars, when labour unions and radical left-wing parties became a favourite target for raids, arrests, and deportations despite a lack of legal authorisation. She concluded that the "excesses of the Russian revolution had frightened the world, but nowhere else were the reactions of business elites used with such force and abandon against the whole spectrum of political opinion on the non-communist labour-left" (Sexton 1991, 138). The conditions for leftist political opinions did not improve after World War II, when the entrance into the cold war era led to a further erosion of civil liberties. Indeed, the failure of socialism in the United States has been noted by authors like Joseph Schumpeter (1942), David Potter (1954), and Daniel Bell (1960) who encounter a prevailing positive attitude towards capitalism among the working class and its alignment with capitalist interests throughout recent history.

The Industrialisation of Public Language

Issues of control were not only defined in terms of political or commercial domination of media structures or properties, but also involve language and the construction of reality. The development and use of a specific language by the media and the interpenetration of language and experience in the presentation of reality are significant events in the making of dominant world views. The commodification of information and entertainment by the press and the rise of advertising with its consumption-oriented language, accompanied and encouraged, if not strengthened, by the educational process, led, in due course, to the production of a public language that is plain and uncomplicated. It is easily grasped, and appeals to the simple mind which still accommodates the limited language abilities of the foreign-born population. Its com-

mon vocabulary reinforces the sense of shared ideas or collective experiences of reality and increases the acceptability of a particular world-view among readers. This process involves the observation, accommodation, and co-optation of public speech and has resulted in the production of a mediated public language which facilitates understanding the world among the middle class, whose language occupies the pages of the press. The particular vocabulary of the media caters to an ideological position; the result has been described by Howard Zinn, who observes that "Words like violence, patriotism, honour, national security, responsibility, democracy, freedom have been assigned meanings difficult to alter" (Zinn 1973, 239).

In the 1990s this language continues to dominate the public discourse and reinforces the use of familiar expressions, which help define social, economic and political realities for media audiences whose representation occurs in the selection and use of language by the media. In this case, participation occurs through familiarity with a language that reveals and obscures, is intelligible and deceptive, and ultimately advances the ideas of those in control of the media. This is yet another form of participation which accommodates the social and political status quo through language, and therefore, through "one of the most important means of initiating, synthesising, and **reinforcing** ways of thinking, feeling, and behaviour which are functionally related to the social group" (Bernstein 1973, 63).

The language of newspapers not only became a technique of directing and channelling social communication, it also constituted an attempt to arrange reality in ways that reflected the ideological position of the press. In this context, new forms of narration, such as cartoons, photographs, colour, and large headlines which privileged immediacy often replace textual explanations. The result is the perfection of an efficient language of social communication that attempts to be unambiguous, accessible, and easy to reproduce in the private realm, in politics, and in advertising. It is also a language of control, in which single words or phrases and stereotypes replace the difficult, speculative, and creative narrative that reflect the complexity and diversity of everyday life. But the emergence of a public language which Herbert Marcuse (1964, 103) describes as a ritual-authoritarian language, is troublesome because it becomes "itself an instrument of control even where it does not transmit orders but information; where it demands not obedience but choice, not submission but freedom. This language controls by reducing the linguistic forms and symbols of reflection, abstraction, development, contradiction; by substituting images for concepts."

Yet, the reduced or impoverished vocabulary of the press constitutes a necessary and sufficient preparation for entering into the public discourse. Consequently, newswork represents the efficient use of language; it is not only employed to accelerate instruction or information, it also facilitates the training and replacement of newsworkers. Therefore, the language of the press also emerges as a tool of subordination with which newsworkers are separated from their work by managerial decisions about the definition of journalistic practices.

The result is not only the control of professional expression and the loss of power through the alienation of work, but also a homogeneity of popular culture and the promotion of a form of cultural identity based on the sophistication of the public discourse. While the former process involves the question of identity and the value of work, the latter conditions involve the problems of status and personal power. The outcome of these changes, that is, the separation from work and the acquisition of

cultural capital, constitutes yet another condition of participation grounded in the social and economic circumstances of society.

In either case, however, the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century dismissed its children into a society that was shaped by structural changes that had been introduced by the process of industrialisation, which, according to Rodgers (1974, 233) "is essentially a story of values, not inventions." The success of the story, however, demanded persuasive narration and a sympathetic audience; the former appeared in the form of editors, like E. L. Godkin, while the latter consisted of the leadership of well educated members of the middle class, for whom laissez-faire and a free market were essential for the survival of society. In the process, according to John Morton Blum (1967, 27-28), industry and "the structure it imparted to society, threatened the satisfaction of persisting aspirations for individual success and freedom. While capitalism adapted to the demands of a massive market, its institutions acquired privileges and immunities which earlier generations had designed for the benefit of the common man." While both the common individual and the industrialist yearned for prosperity and stability, it was the world of business and industry that secured its own place through consolidation, while individual attempts to organise their collective interests remained only partially successful. When government was advised to help restrain dissent and protect property, it was directed against those, whose fortunes did not coincide with the growth of industrialism. Among them were members of the working class in the urban centres of America with great hopes for their own future in the ranks of a growing middle class.

Technology, Democracy and Alienation

This process of urbanisation and industrialisation was accompanied by the process of alienation, however, as the pressure of work performance and the sense of personal isolation began to effect the climate of society. Earlier Karl Marx (1975, 324-334) had provided a classic observation of the estrangement of workers and of their production, which moves from economic factors into the realm of the social world, where the manifestations of self-estrangement are found in the relationship between the individual, others and nature. The effects of the self-estrangement of individuals, who are directed by their own action and its consequences, and who experience themselves and others as an abstraction, constitute one of the central issues of capitalism. Thus, alienation included the denial of one's own history; individual experiences became objectified rather than social or cultural encounters. Erich Fromm (1955, 129) suggests that an individual's sense of self in industrialised societies "does not stem from his activity as a loving or thinking individual, but from his socio-economic role," and he suggests that his "sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can sell himself favourably, whether he can make more of himself than he started out with, whether he is a success." Since the result of alienation is a growing sense of failure in the face of increasing pressures of the workplace, for instance, or psychological discomfort and sickness, the consequences of industrialisation became transparent and problematic in a society that was fixed on the idea of work. In fact, the problem was diagnosed as excess labour, and books like George Beard's ***American Nervousness*** (1881) blamed the conditions of the nineteenth century, particularly its high-pressure education, over-specialisation of labour, speed of work performance, and general tempo of the times for the neurological and physical complaints of a gen-

eration of Americans.

Rodgers (1974, 106) describes this phenomenon and concludes that the "long campaign against overwork served as the intellectual side to a conspicuous expansion of free time and free-time activities" which suggested the demotion of work from an essential to an instrumental virtue. The result was a new outlook in which play and leisure time became work, and work was play. Such changes were accompanied by increasing appeals to diversion through entertainment, particularly with the rise of the tabloid press, dime novels, film, radio, and finally television and personal computers, which have become the most successful instruments of recreation and distraction in the 1990s. More specifically, after completing a major phase of industrialisation during the 1910s, the problem of work as a social process had been successfully identified with the idea of collective responsibility and as a necessary and sufficient condition for economic advancement, happiness, and well-being, when the notion of leisure became just another aspect of every-day existence. The merger of work and play into a new philosophy of American life became part of a middle-class ideal. At the same time, the liberation from toil and the potential of less work and more leisure time was an equally appealing alternative for the working class.

Further mechanisation and the rise of technology were accompanied by shorter work days, better pay, and the prospects of conspicuous consumption, which was identified by Thorstein Veblen, among others, with the nature of the leisure class, and therefore, with notions of freedom. As Dallas Smythe (1994, 237) suggests, they were also accompanied by the realisation that the "uses of technique (in the sense of machines of ever-growing sophistication) in capitalism have been linked with alienation of people, with specialisation of functions of people, and with hierarchical arrangements of people in bureaucratic structures."

The process of alienation continued with the replacement of human contacts by media environments. In fact, the notion of individualism was easily shifted to become part of the vocabulary of commerce and industry, where individualism had more to do with the subjugation of others than with social or private concerns. This process redefined the understanding of freedom and individualism in a consumer society, when participation was legitimised by commercial practices.

The press participated in shifting attention from production and work to entertainment by preparing its readers to accommodate leisure time as yet another opportunity for consumption. The media acquired a major stake in the commercialisation of leisure and became less interested in the pursuit of social needs than in the profitability of their products, e.g., the success of dime novels, tabloid newspapers, comics, video, radio, or television, and most recently computer games. Adorno addresses the impact of the culture industry on leisure, the commodification of leisure, and the transformation of the profit motive onto cultural forms; he suggested that the culture industry proclaims, "you shall conform, without instructions to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which everyone thinks anyway as a reflex of its power and omnipresence. The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness" (Adorno 1975, 15-17).

A changing attitude towards work and the development of new labour-saving technologies has encouraged individuals to access the media for purposes of information and education as well as distraction, play, and recreation and encouraged the routinisation of leisure time. But the media provide access only for those, whose pros-

perity, education, and class status ensured regular use, while those with less economic and educational capital are either restricted in or deprived of their utilisation of the media. Consequently, the accessibility of increasingly sophisticated information and entertainment is accompanied by a process of separation of individuals as participants in the affairs of state and community. It has become a disturbing feature of late capitalist societies in which a generous supply of information and entertainment competes for the limited financial and educational resources of audiences. Under such conditions print media are becoming the domain of a new, affluent and literate middle class, while electronic media, especially radio, television, and video, serve the needs of an impoverished majority. The creed of equal opportunity crashes into the state of personal qualification, including financial solvency.

Throughout these developments of the social environment, ranging from the industrialisation of work to the institutionalisation of leisure, the issue of class remains buried in the margin of the American culture. Communication research, even in its most modern or post-modern cultural studies mode, continues to operationalise media-and-society problems with an implied middle-classness reminiscent of a traditional, sociological approach to class as status in society. There is no sustained interest in a working-class culture per se, or its real or potential contribution to the breadth and diversity of the social environment. Since the definition of the American public sphere has been conditioned by a dominant middle-class perception of society, questions of communication and media in society have been confined to bourgeois concerns rather than liberated to include working-class issues of representation. As a result, it is quite possible that recent forays by communication studies into issues of gender, race, and ethnicity have been based on typical middle-class anxieties or perceptions of civic duties and responsibilities that are liberal/progressive reactions to social and economic conditions of society, rather than on political considerations of class and class consciousness.

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