THE END OF JOURNALISM
MEDIA AND NEWSWORK IN THE UNITED STATES

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The decline of capitalism and socialism as the dominant utopias of the twentieth century is accompanied by a collapse of their respective ideological constructions of communication, participation, and democracy, including the role of the press[1] and the function of journalists.

Proclaiming the end of journalism, following earlier, and certainly more provocative pronouncements about the end of ideology (Bell 1960), history (Fukuyama 1992), science (Horgan 1996), or the world (Leslie 1996) for that matter, is more than a belated polemic concerning the current dilemma of journalism in the United States. Instead, it is a reminder of an historical process in late capitalism which reveals the subordination of journalism as a cultural practice to the economic rationale of marketing and new information technologies. As a result, there seems to be widespread agreement among professionals that "mass communication as we know it is dying" (*News in the Next Century* 1996, vi), not only because of the introduction of an inexpensive and accessible communication technology which offers more choices (to some), but also because of fundamental changes in the meaning of journalism. While the latter are rarely addressed, the former are ceaselessly promoted by media conglomerates which demonstrate a ferocious appetite for controlling larger portions of the traditional media spectrum and the financial promises of the Internet, whose virtually limitless potential for social empowerment, however, is no guarantee for freedom from domination by the profit-orientation of private corporations. In either case, commercialisation dictates the nature of journalism and prescribes the limits of public interest.

American journalism — predicated on the principle of a free press that combines notions of technology and democracy to demonstrate the potential power of a free flow of ideas — is also a cultural practice that is tied to

the specific historical conditions of society and subject to the social, economic, and political developments by which it is shaped and defined. Yet, over the course of the last century, the utopian vision of journalism as an independent, fourth estate, based on the accomplishments of journalists rather than on the institutional claims of the press, has been gradually replaced by a commercial solution, whose economic consequences have trivialised traditional, social and cultural co-determinants of journalism, including journalists, newswork, and the pursuit of public interests.

This essay constitutes a critical reading of historical representations and contemporary observations of relations between press and journalists which identify and define the conflict between the ownership of the means of communication and intellectual labour, regarding the practice of journalism. As such, it is a reflection on the narratives of journalism histories and contemporary periodical literatures, which, like other cultural products, evolve in the context of specific professional experiences and beliefs; they are the expressions of the social, political, or economic conditions of specific historical moments and represent the ruling ideas of the time.

The essay also suggests that the dilemma of contemporary journalism, frequently addressed in economic terms and focused on the changing nature of media ownership, is the end-product of a preferred cultural construction of journalists. Such a construction is a historical phenomenon which has its roots in the making of American journalism and the relationship between the institution of the press and the individual contribution of labour. In fact, the idea of journalism as a cultural practice has undergone significant definitional changes related to shifting notions of work, including technological advancements in the workplace, and the predicaments of a volatile market economy as media interests merged with the politics of mass society. The press has rarely been a facilitator of intellectual labour free from a business-oriented paternalism that directed journalists in their work. Thus, this essay focuses on the inadequacy of a labour perspective by considering newsworkers and their changing visions of journalism vis-à-vis the construction of their professional roles by the institutional authority of the press. The social and political consequences of a hegemonic approach to professionalism are the demise of traditional notions of journalistic practices and the rise of corporate power and control over the contemporary role and function of journalists, the manner of "mass" communication, and the purposes of media, in general.

Such conclusions have serious consequences not only for the profession, including professional education, but also for society and for the relationship of information, knowledge and democracy. They not only suggest a new system of gathering and distributing information, but, more fundamentally, a new authority for defining the nature and type of information that provides the foundation of social and political decision-making, and a new partisanship that embraces the patrons of commerce and industry; in this sense, it offers a new understanding of democracy as private enterprise rather than public endeavour, when extent and quality of information, including its specificity and accessibility, depend more on the social, economic, or political needs of commerce and industry than on the requirements of an informed public.

When journalism serves society in the role of information broker, it has been strengthened by its history and fortified by the perpetuation of its myth, which rests on a belief in the availability of truth, the objectivity of facts, and the need for public disclosure to create and sustain the idea of journalism as a necessary condition for a

democratic way of life. Although journalists have played a key role in the advancement of their own cultural and political legacy since the last century, they have been frequently co-opted and deceived by media ownership in its own attempts to obtain the confidence of large audiences for political and economic gains.

In particular, journalism histories and reporting textbooks in the United States reinforce an emerging myth of the press as a paternalistic, top down, cultural phenomenon, which allowed the labour of journalists to proceed under the protection of First Amendment guarantees that were couched polemically in the name of the press, and ultimately, in the name of democracy. As a result, much has been written about journalistic work, the process of newsgathering, and its underlying purpose of serving society and catering to the principles of enlightenment and progress. These writings have strengthened popular versions of the relationship between press and society with the dissemination of concepts like "fourth estate," "voice of the people," or "watchdog" of society without direct references to the role of journalists or the relations between journalists and these particular claims of the press. Instead, they suggest not only an idealist construction of such relations, but reflect an authoritative assertion of power over representations of people or public opinion, including an implied, self-defined, historical obligation to represent and protect the social and political interests of ordinary citizens.

Nevertheless, the myth of a strong and impartial press operating in the interest of society has prevailed throughout this period, strengthened, no doubt, by self-promotion, including the writing of a celebratory journalism history, and occasional journalistic accomplishments that had more to do with indulging individual, unfettered activities of enterprising journalists than with collective corporate action based on the social consciousness of press ownership. Such an image of the press includes the labour of journalists whose role has been successfully contained within the organisational media structure through a ritual of appropriating not only journalists but also audiences, the obvious accomplices of journalists in their search for societal truths. Appropriation describes the historical process of incorporating journalists into the system of information gathering and news production while dominating the conditions of employment and the definition of work, including the determination of content. It involves the reinforcement of traditional myths representing notions of institutional power and expert communities and suggesting an active involvement of journalists in the activities of the "fourth estate" and its "professional" practices; it is a process that confers status, and combined with the promise of upward mobility, reflects effective social and cultural incentives for individuals in their quest for personal recognition and success.

Tracing the creation of such myths may serve as an important source for understanding the history of journalists and the limits of their practices, since it reveals the interests of the press and its effect on the prevalent, public definitions of journalism. The latter also provide a measure of control over audiences in their considerations of the potential role of the press in society.

Constructing the Fourth Estate

Thus, the history of adopting the "fourth estate" and its subsequent treatment in the literature of American journalism provide an appropriate example of how a specific, institutional image of the press prevails, embracing the class-conscious social

and cultural origins of the concept and revealing the proximity of its bourgeois interests to issues of class and privileged standing in society, while disregarding the issue of labour.

The notion of the fourth estate has served to explain the role and function of the press in the United States for a considerable part of its history, although it was originally used in England to refer to the standing of journalists within a class conscious society vis-à-vis the nobility, the clergy, and the commons, which constituted the traditional estates and their entrenched interests.

The idea of "estate" reflects a consciousness of social differences which became a major political question in Europe during the nineteenth century, when democratic movements demanded equality and representation by challenging traditional definitions of the state and the privileges of the ruling classes. Thus, in a footnote to his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" in 1843, Karl Marx explains that, "an 'estate' (Stand) is an order or class of men in civil society which is distinguished by trade, profession, status, etc. In the sphere of political society 'Estates' (Stände) is a term used to designate that body which in the field of legislation represents the various particular interests of civil society" (1975, 124).

With the beginning of industrialisation different theoretical models of social and political change appear in Germany to explain the emerging working class; one is based on the claims of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that the division of society into working class and bourgeoisie is a historical necessity, and the other one on an argument by Wilhelm H. Riehl that traditional class distinctions are insufficient explanations of social transformation. His designation of the fourth estate as "a class of the classless" or "the negation of all classes" incorporates the proletariat, among others, and represents a conservative attempt to deal with the process of "socially organised discontent" (Riehl 1990, 231, 232). It reflects the consequences of social change, when individuals break away or are rejected from traditional forms of the social order and are temporarily united in a struggle against historical continuities of society. The fourth estate represents the process of entering modernity with all of its dire consequences for those who seek salvation in the ways of the past. For Riehl "the fourth estate is with us, like it or not, and since factories are also with us, and since journalism is with us, and since the world is no longer the world it once was, its impact will not be merely transitory" (Riehl 1990, 257).

Regardless of any particular theoretical position, however, the consequences of industrialisation become a major topic during the latter part of the nineteenth century and are the focus of debates about a new social order. While Marx talks about the potential of class consciousness among workers, Riehl addresses the consequences of possessing "labour but not property" (Riehl 1990, 253) as an indication of cultural disintegration rather than social consolidation. Both positions contribute to the "social question," which deals with the relationship between middle class interests and the emergence of a large and potentially destabilising working class that occupy political economists in nineteenth century Germany.

On the other hand, designations by class or class analysis were never common in the United States. Also, journalists did not see themselves as representatives of the working class, nor were they categorised by social theorists or politicians as class conscious workers or members of a specific estate. Instead, journalists were regarded as belonging to and/or representing the ownership of the press, rather than being part of

an intellectual proletariat, like in Europe. Thus, the origin of the term fourth estate as it relates to the practice of journalism, belongs to a European tradition of estates, and to the British fondness for class distinctions, in particular. When the concept reappears in the U.S. literature of journalism it signifies the perceived and argued standing of the press among other institutions in society.

Accordingly, it was Thomas B. Macaulay, who described the press bench in the British House of Parliament as the fourth estate, thus granting social standing and prestige to representatives of newspaper proprietors who had a growing interest not only in the political affairs of Parliament, but in political life itself. The term rises to prominence by the mid-nineteenth century and signals the recognition of the press in the realm of politics and confirms an improvement of journalism from its disreputable beginnings as a source of gossip and entertainment to its role among political institutions as a credible mover of information and public opinion. In fact, George Boyce provides a treatment of early British newspaper developments and offers a useful and extensive appraisal of the concept. After tracing the mythology of the fourth estate through British press history, Boyce concludes that as an ideological construction it served to legitimate the status of journalists within the political system and their opposition to state control of the press. The idea of the fourth estate gains respectability and credibility in a climate of commercial and political interests in the potential of information, and the British press, "with its head in politics and its feet in commerce," succeeds in promoting the fourth estate as a useful myth, which serves to sell papers and political influence (Boyce 1978, 27).

At the time the fourth estate appears in the American vocabulary of the press, it is also employed to secure recognition, status, and ultimately, power within the political establishment. Despite the fact that the term acknowledges social differences, if not a class structure, and reflects a political standing in society, it was appropriated and used to describe a democratic process. For instance, a number of contemporary dictionary definitions reinforce the institutional nature of the term. The fourth estate is "a group other than the clergy, nobility or commons that wields political power" (***Webster's*** 1971); it is found "formerly in various jocular applications (...) now appropriated by the press (Oxford, 1989) and has become a "traditional, almost cliché term for journalism and the press" (Connors 1982). A more recent entry suggests that "the term pays tribute to the power of the press, which is thus ranked with the three traditional 'estates' or orders of medieval and early modern society — the nobility, the clergy, and the commons" (***Americana*** 1993).

According to Herbert Brucker (1949, 30), "some time in the early nineteenth century this unofficial designation of Fourth Estate became attached to the press." He suggests that "sincere editors use the term when pouring out their hearts about their profession; and publishers who don't like a Wages and Hours Act find in it a convenient shield against the future." Brucker argues almost 25 years later that the conception of the press as a fourth estate provides an understanding of the place of information in a democracy and confirms its independence, "ideally, journalism is a neutral agency not associated with any of the other estates that make up the body politic" (Brucker 1973, 82). The work of John Hulteng and Roy Paul Nelson (1983) is perhaps typical of the use of the term in U.S. journalism literature, where it reflects the idea of an independent press vis-à-vis other institutions, including government. This usage is also consistent with earlier interpretations manifested in journalism histories. For

instance, George Henry Payne devotes a chapter to the "rise of the fourth estate," which deals with the beginning of journalism in the United States. According to Payne it is "the veritable creation of a new Estate" that represents a new power, based on the idea of the liberty of the press, whose rise suggests that "henceforth the history of the country is not of kings and battle, but largely of that power and of those wielding it" (Payne 1924, 59-60). And finally, Leonard Levy (1985, 291) concludes that the "most common libertarian principle of a free press espoused by newspapers revealed their watchdog function as the Fourth Estate."

An understanding of the business side of the press as a fourth estate is reflected in the editorial positions of trade publications. For instance, ***The Fourth Estate***, established in 1894, carried in its masthead a quote, attributed to Carlyle (in "Heroes and Hero Worship, Lecture V"), which read, "Edmund Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament, but in the Reporters' Gallery yonder there sat a Fourth estate more important far then they all" (***The Fourth Estate*** 1895, cover page).The quote appeared opposite the designation, "A newspaper for the Makers of Newspapers and Investors in advertising." The ***Fourth Estate*** merged in 1927 with ***Editor & Publisher,*** whose own position had been strengthened by a merger in 1925 with ***Newspaperdom***, a trade magazine for small-town weekly newspapers. Thus, when ***Editor & Publisher*** emerged from the late 1920s as the strongest trade publication in the United States, "serving the journalistic field," it primarily addressed the "makers of newspapers" (***Editor & Publisher*** 1929, cover page)and embraced the idea of the fourth estate as a condition for business. Similarly, in 1911 Joseph Medill Patterson, later publisher of the New York ***Daily News***, wrote a play, ***The Fourth Estate***, which reflects on the standing of newspaper publishers in the world of business and high society.

The term fourth estate also enters legal and philosophical interpretations of the First Amendment in efforts to clarify the position of the press. A well-known contemporary interpretation is rendered by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, for instance, who suggests that the primary purpose of a constitutional guarantee is to create a "fourth institution outside the Government as an additional check on the three official branches." He adds, "The relevant metaphor, I think, is the metaphor of the Fourth Estate," and he refers to the British usage of the term to argue that the survival of "our republic" would be impossible without an autonomous press (Stewart 1975, 636). Similarly, James Boylan reports that Harrison Salisbury described the publication of the Pentagon papers by the *New York Times* as an occasion at which the newspaper had "quite literally become that Fourth Estate, the fourth co-equal branch of government" (Boylan 1986, 37). More recently, Bernard Schwartz (1992, 132) claims that there are indications that the Americans "had a concept of the press similar to that attributed to Burke by Carlyle," and he agrees with Levy that by the time of the First Amendment, U.S. newspapers had achieved a "watchdog function as the Fourth Estate."

These authors acknowledge the preferred position of the press to act in the name of the public and its right to know. They represent a point of view that accepts or favours a strong and independent role of the press, with no indication, however, that the consequences of industrialisation, in particular, had also produced the rise of large political constituencies, which were important to political and commercial interests and had the attention of the press. As a result, social and political diversity was quickly appropriated, processed, packaged, and labelled by the press as expressions of public opinion, disregarding issues of autonomy and representation. There was no reflec-

tion of social, racial, or economic diversity and its consequences in a democratic society, when the press seized the role of supporter, defender, or upholder of public interests, but a specific, self-indulgent mission and an awareness of the political importance of representation. As a result, the preferred interpretation of the press as a fourth estate is repeated in the general literature of journalism and political appraisals of the press throughout most of this century. Not to be outdone and searching for an independent identity, the broadcasting industry adopts the term, the fifth estate, during this period; radio, according to Judith Waller (1946, 3), "has become the Fifth Estate, a factor in the life of the world without which no one can reckon."

However, with increasing media criticism and a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between media and society, the idea of a fourth or fifth estate, for that matter, has run into severe problems related to the social and political consequences of power, influence, and responsibility. For instance, among contemporary issues surrounding the notion of a fourth estate is the problem of accountability, which raises questions about the nature of representation, including competence, compatibility, and the consequences of acting on behalf of the public. Lucas A. Powe, Jr. (1991, 291) expounds on the fourth estate model of the press as set forward by Potter Stewart and suggests that "whether and how the press is to be held accountable represents the important intellectual gulf between the right-to-know model and the Fourth Estate model of the press." A more detailed attack on the fourth estate model, which not only provides power without responsibility, but also assumes a passive audience, comes from Patrick M. Garry. He acknowledges the typical characterisation of the press as "an agent of the public, in a separation of power scheme, that functions to check abuses of governmental power" and recognises that the press also becomes an independent participant in the political process and "serves an equalising function between government and a disorganised and helpless society" (Garry 1990, 127).

At issue is the problem of identifying the interests of the press with those of the public and whether such a model will ultimately weaken the democratic process. At stake is the relationship between media and their respective publics, that is, how media define service and accessibility in ethnically or economically diverse communities. According to Garry, the "fourth estate model "effectively enhances and magnifies the power of one of the participants in the communication process — the owners of the mass media — with apparently no thought of imposing on the press concomitant responsibilities to assure that the new protection will actually enlarge and protect opportunities for expression." Instead of providing a forum for public issues, it seems that the "the fourth estate model theory creates a fourth bureaucracy with substantial power and quite separate from the general public" (Garry 1990, 131-133). Similarly, John Merrill raises the question of how a fourth estate, or a "fourth branch of government," is constituted and for whose benefit, calling the idea "not only mythical, but almost farcical" (1974, 117).

Since its introduction, the term fourth estate has helped reinforce the widely accepted notion of a powerful press and restore confidence in the political position of the press and its right to express and represent public interests. However, the enthusiasm for a term that also confirms an extra-legal, privileged, and elitist position of the press has faded in recent years, due, perhaps, partly to public dissatisfaction with media performances and the failure of the media to provide moral and substantive leadership for the people they purport to represent, and partly because the relationship

between business and politics, which includes the media, has become too obvious to support a separate claim. Instead, the media have adopted a patronage model; they are responsive to those who seek their particular services, that is, advertisers and their respective consumer — audiences. Journalists are caught up in this process, they reproduce the conditions of patronage and are reduced to advance the task of advertising departments as the fourth estate has no desire to speak for the "estateless" but in a paternalistic fashion, while those who "possess labor but not property, " including journalists, are reduced to objects of commercial greed and political manipulation.

Constructing Newswork

While discussions surrounding the emergence of a "fourth-estate" model of the press have focused on the institutional representation of such "estate," the position of journalists as members of the "estate" and their relations with the ownership of the means of communication have not been problematised; even critics of this model have disregarded issues of intellectual production (journalistic practices) as a separate problematic. However, by dealing with the press as an inclusive concept, considerations of intellectual labour become neutralised and serve the anti-labour interests of the media rather than the interests of working journalists and their particular concerns as they relate to the conditions of labour, freedom of expression, and the relations of production.

The conditions of journalism in modernity and the contemporary task of the media are shaped by the rising importance of information, the impact of technology, and the commodification of knowledge. The inevitable shift to an information society has made different demands on journalists and their relations to each other and to their institutions, and effects the notion of work itself when information and knowledge rather than property constitute social and political power (and divide society into classes). Consequently, "work comes to be less and less defined as a personal contribution and more as a role within a system of communications and social relations," according to Alain Touraine, who also observes that "the one who controls exerts influence on the systems of social relations in the name of their needs; the one who is controlled constantly affirms his existence, not as a member of any organisation, element of the production process, or subject of a State, but as an autonomous unit whose personality does not coincide with any of his roles" (Touraine 1995, 188). The result is not only an increasing sense of alienation, but a changing perception of what constitutes journalism and, therefore, public interest and social responsibility, at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

And yet, in the past the celebration of technological progress obscured or concealed the fate of journalistic labour, particularly in historical accounts that shaped the understanding of journalism in society. Thus, mainstream narratives of American journalism history introduced the use of new media technologies as institutional accomplishments while disregarding their effects on working journalists. Specifically, Emery (1978), Hohenberg (1973), Jones (1947), and Mott (1942) remain oblivious to the impact of technology on newsworkers, but agree that media technologies are essential elements in the trend towards specialisation among newsroom labour. More recently, Emery and Emery (1988) attributed the distinctness of newswork to communication technologies without elaborating on the conditions of newsworkers who have been forced repeatedly to reinvent their professional existence in light of encroaching

technologies (Hardt 1990, 351). These observations in standard journalism history texts support popular beliefs, and a form of crude capitalism, that media technology is an assertion of inevitable progress; they are produced in the spirit of endorsing an institutional history of the press that refuses to problematise the rise of media technologies and totally neglects the human dimension of labour, like the impact of technology on the work environment, the definition of work, freedom of choice and, ultimately, the professional status of individual newsworkers.

However, this development is documented in the unwritten, collective biographies of American journalists and their loss of control over definitions of work and, ultimately, professional identity; it appears in more recent observations by media historians about news and the changing conditions of labour. Thus, when news evolves as a central value of American journalism during the 1870s, according to Hazel Dicken-Garcia (1989, 60), it also results in a shift from "news **persons** to news **selling**, and an editor-centred, personal structure gave way to corporatism, focused on advances in technology, increased competition, large circulations, diversification, and advertising as a means to profit." Similarly, James Carey (1969, 32) observed some time ago how the rise of objective reporting, for instance, demanded technical instead of intellectual skills and resulted in a "conversion downward" for journalists. The subsequent introduction of new communication technologies, ranging from telegraph and telephone to computers, however, strengthened not only management control, but also increased the anonymity of the work process and reduced the expectations of journalists to be recognised for their unique intellectual or creative contributions to the profession. In fact, according to Marianne Salcetti (1995, 49), the contributions of newsworkers since the late nineteenth century were "increasingly bordered, and in turn valued, by their technological place in the production process of gathering, writing, and producing news." On the other hand, while Douglas Birkhead (1982, 220) talks about the fact that "the journalist as professional seemed to extend the rationality and efficiency of technology into the newsroom," Charles Derber (1983, 327) warns that "technicalization" of professionals must lead to "ideological proletarianization," and Yung-Ho Im (1990, 112) acknowledges a decisive change in the status of journalists when he concludes that "reporters, as a newly created breed of newsworkers, still carried the old label of journalists, but without as much individual voice and discretion (...) as journalists of the earlier days of personal journalism."

The "downward conversion" reflects commercial considerations of the marketplace which focus on the technical expertise of information retrieval rather than on the competence of critical analysis; the latter has been shifted to (educated) consumers or left to experts, whose ideological perspectives, even if oppositional, seem most agreeable to management, because authorised dissent helps legitimise the dominant power structure. Hence, intellectual requirements among contemporary journalists are replaced by technical knowledge in compliance with corporate media goals. The latter divide the workplace and fragment the reportorial process, destabilise the professional worth of journalists, and alienate them from their own labour. All the while, decisions regarding the definition and treatment of news are centralised in a media bureaucracy that is dominated by specific management concerns. Under these circumstances, it has been noticed that "professionally trained journalists (...) could become increasingly less necessary to the process of gathering and distributing information" (***News in the Next Century*** 1996, 21).

In other words, contemporary journalists encounter growing routinised work situations and a definition of professional autonomy that is "bordered" by technical aspects of news production and dissemination which constitute their concrete experience of the labour process. This understanding of work has prevailed in American journalism for some time, certainly long enough to have created an atmosphere of diminished expectations among journalists, and despite institutional efforts by the press to counter-produce a positive, empowering image of professional standing and social responsibility by identifying with journalism as a public service and appropriating journalists as executors of the public will. Journalists, on the other hand, have grown less committed to their choice or place of work and remain autonomous in their personal life and in their attitudes towards a specific engagement in the public cause of journalism. As William Solomon observes, "like their counterparts of more than a century ago, today's newsroom workers increasingly are coming to view their work as combining a sacred public trust with a temporary job" (Solomon 1995, 131).

Despite the undisputed theoretical or historical importance of the role of journalists in the democratic process, there has never been a sustained public debate in the United States about safeguarding their professional practice for the sake of a free and independent flow of ideas, regardless of proprietary economic or political interests that represent the ownership of the press. Indeed, in a society, in which property rights have historically been far more protected than other rights, including the right of expression, press ownership dictates the type and quality of journalism as well as its purposes and typically sides with propertied interests. Thus, when the activities of the media occupy the public imagination because of their perceived effects on society, journalists are frequently viewed collectively by society as members of the media establishment. Consequently, as long as they are identified or identify with the institution of the press, journalists will be defined in terms of private rather than public interests. In fact, corporate media authority treats journalists as newsworkers rather than as free-floating intellectuals not only by appropriating their professional aura, but also by obstructing or blocking possibilities of forging professional alliances among journalists or with their audiences in defence of journalism as an intellectual contribution to the discourse of society. As a result, journalists have been subject to a history of subjugation by those in control of the means of communication who use the idea of professionalism to validate their own commercial purposes and/or enhance public perceptions of the press as an institution.

Specifically, traditional histories of the press have constructed journalists as an anonymous labour pool, whose activities were subsumed under various descriptions of the press or the accomplishments and controls of their owners (Hardt 1990). For instance, the formation of unions and the operations of organised newsroom labour have been actively discouraged, if not opposed, by press ownership since the 1920s, when such activities began; a few years later, news organisations started to regulate professional conduct and discouraged journalists from joining civic organisations. In the 1990s, finally, while some publishers remain suspicious of what has been called public journalism, a "hot, new secular religion" (Stein 1995, 18-19), which admonishes journalists to become positively involved in community affairs, others use the appeal of "civic" journalism to boost their service to clients, disguised as "the public," in attempts to promote image and sales, while appeasing critics. Indeed, when public journalism has become a rallying cry for media critics, it has been for making journalism

more public and, therefore, responsive to the needs of the community. This effort has been spearheaded by Jay Rosen's (1994) attempts to organise newsworkers behind the idea of community as a relevant category of journalistic concern. Still, the discussants of civic journalism typically represent the interests of media management and/or journalism education rather than journalists, whose concerns have always been on the side of public curiosity and the need to know. Thus, at best, considerations of public service are reflections of a continuing struggle over defining the nature of work and work environments between media managers and journalists; at worst, they indicate different ideological positions on relations between journalism and society. In either case, the collective economic and political power of media proprietors persistently prevails over the professional sentiments of poorly organised, dependent newsworkers.

The notion of professionalisation became a major ideological force of press management in the separation of newsworkers from fellow employees and the public. The former were regarded as sufficiently different in their practices while the public was constructed as an objectified source and/or destination of information rather than as a cultural context of subjective experiences and participation. Indeed, the evolution of "professionalisation" as a strategy of separating shared labour interests among printers and editorial workers by providing promises of social status and professional independence remains a major source of explanation for the diffusion of the editorial labour process and the continuous domination of twentieth century journalism by management. The organisation of labour interests among journalists as a potential weapon in a fight for independence was successfully quelled when professional status became a myth that was carefully constructed by press ownership to isolate and defeat union activities in the wake of mounting pressures by organised labour. Edward Herman recently observed that, after all, "professionalism was not an antagonistic movement by the workers against the press owners, but was actively encouraged by the latter." He characterises it as a "badge of legitimacy to journalism" (Herman 1996, 120) which divided the varied interests of labour in media industries; but it also offers an appropriate example of how professionalism in modern society evolved into an ideology which, according to Peter Meiksins (1986, 115), more generally "exercised a powerful hold over significant portions of the workforce and placed formidable barriers between those occupations which define themselves as 'professions' and other types of wage-labor." In this context, deprofessionalisation as a consequence of deconstructing institutional representations of journalists may help restore creative and intellectual autonomy to individuals in their roles as journalists at a time, when a persuasive, symbolic process of negotiating representations of reality and making social knowledge is replacing the model of privileged journalistic discourse based on independent notions of truth and objectivity. As a result, journalistic practice would be situated close to literary craftsmanship and its intellectual standards, as Theodore Glasser (1996) has argued.

But the question of professionalisation is ultimately tied to the changing notion of work; while intellectual labour originally constituted a personal, autonomous contribution to the advancement of knowledge or the spread of information, for instance, its contemporary version of editorial work under the control of media management becomes a technical requirement within an information system that is designed to serve an elitist clientele rather than the public. In this context, journalists seem to lack

the power of a professional class, whose policies and practices should matter enough to warrant First Amendment protection of intellectual autonomy against the influence of media organisations, for instance, to effect editorial decision-making. A U.S. Supreme Court decision (Cohen v. Cowles Media Co.) in 1991, however, guarantees the power of publishers to reduce the professional autonomy of newsworkers in a most significant way. Thus, private business interests prevail over potential public concerns regarding the need for professional independence and occupational integrity and result in the defence of institutional rather than individual welfare.

The changing definition of news has become a major issue in ongoing debates among journalists and in a literature that deals with the consequences of business philosophies and management styles for the press. More recently, for instance, Doug Underwood (1993) has provided a detailed analysis of how a marketing approach to journalism is reshaping contemporary media; although highly critical of these trends, the author suggests that the (daily) press still has an opportunity to present an independent, analytical, and in-depth alternative to television; unwilling to give up on the press, he pleads with press ownership to adjust profit margins, reject the formation of media conglomerates, and embrace the "traditional values of public service and the principles of public trust that are the bedrock of the profession" (Underwood 1993, 181). It seems highly unlikely that the ownership of the press will follow his advice; on the contrary, with a labour market saturated with inexperienced journalism (and other university) graduates as sources of cheap labour, or unemployed journalists with expert standing, media management will continue to dictate conditions of labour and extend its reach into new media markets, especially with increasing competitive pressure from new media, such as computers and information services like Internet. As a result, there is an increasing need for seeking maximum profits to absorb competitors or reinforce their current hold on their own market, particularly among newspapers in light of the fact that circulation losses continue to plague the industry (Fitzgerald 1995).

More specifically, in the last decade, business news sections have been increased, and newspapers, like ***USA Today***, have been founded to cater primarily to the business traveller, while news agencies find the business news market to be the most lucrative aspect of their various services. Such developments have come at the expense of strengthening or expanding hard news or news analysis. The emphasis on business affairs has been the first step in reinforcing media ties with advertisers, only to be followed by further packaging and marketing the press to comply with the demands of advertisers and readers to provide commercially safe and reader friendly content. For instance, Sears executives have suggested that "a strong partnership" with newspapers depends on their response to the specific needs of retailers, "whether you're a department store or a newspaper, the recipe for success in the years ahead is the same: continual self-analysis, hard work, an open mind, excellent people, lots of patience, and, more importantly, a strong customer focus" (Consoli 1995, 25).

The process of newsgathering has typically been informed by an understanding of existing social and economic inequities in society; however, the rapidly shifting imbalance between accumulations of wealth and the growth of poverty accommodates representations of political and economic strength and prescribes considerations of class, gender, or race as economic categories of consumption that redefine the adversarial function of the press and result in a friendly alliance with the interests of business and

industry. Indeed, the key to understanding the dilemma of contemporary journalism lies in its definition by the ownership of the press; such definition, however, is always self-imposed and more often than not serves its immediate political and economic interests. As Milton Friedman (1970) observed over 25 years ago, businesses are responsible only for making profits and obeying laws. Consequently, the commodification of news, that is, news as an industrial product, remains immune to traditional demands for socially responsible content, but is guided, instead, by market requirements and the standard legal restrictions governing defamation or invasion of privacy. In this sense, the manufacture of news no longer demands professional involvement, but can be accomplished by a cheap labour force which is computer-literate and more attuned to packaging information than to exercising analytical skills.

In fact, the process of deskilling, introduced by Harry Braverman (1974) as an explanation of how technology (or scientific rationality) transformed status and skill of the modern work force, continues to effect contemporary labour, also threatens journalism, and ultimately devalues journalistic labour power. As a historical phenomenon, the process of deskilling moved from the creativity of personal journalism to the routines of objective reporting, when events rather than ideas directed professional practice. Im examines Braverman's deskilling thesis in the context of arguing for a labour process approach as a conceptual framework of a labour history of journalism (1990) which would address issues of work and class. Most recently, however, the reproduction of information has overshadowed earlier developments and determines the nature of journalistic labour. This shifting notion of skills raises questions about the nature of professionalism at a time, when the threat of unionisation has been diminished, if not eliminated, and large-scale replacements with cheap labour have become a real alternative under changing definitions of newswork. The process of deskilling (as a managerial practice) confronts individual journalists everywhere and yield responses ranging from attempts to preserve or redefine skills in an effort to satisfy the demands for a new type of journalism, to active resistance and finally, resignation from the profession altogether.

However, journalists never challenged the organisation of media power directly and collectively. Partly, because their ideological position, that is, a shared belief in the virtues of capitalism and the subordination of subjective notions of professional practice to technological demands, has always been maintained with organisational consent, if not urging, and partly because journalists have traditionally relied on constructing labour problems in terms of individual, local conditions rather than systemic, class-related issues. They also compensated in other ways, ranging from a short-term commitment to journalism or physical mobility, to engaging in unrelated, external activities. For instance, Bonnie Brennen reports about the use of period novels as a type of creative protest against the debasement of individuals and suggests that "a sense of class-consciousness encouraged journalists to contest their oppression and challenge the dominant hegemony of the newsroom" during the 1920s and 1930s (Brennen 1995, 104). More currently, the rise of newsroom activism is another example of how individual journalists through informal professional relations have struggled against race and sex discrimination in the workplace and frequently in opposition to imposed management structures on the flow of information within the newsroom (Byerly and Warren 1996).

Such activities may be locally contained, but there are other examples of nation-

wide trends among newsworkers which may lead to an increased sense of political awareness and suggest that in the long run, dissatisfaction among the dependable and loyal, if critical, rank and file will become particularly troublesome for management. The published findings of a national survey by the Human Resources Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Stinnett 1989) provides a good example of this dilemma. Its discussion of the newsroom, including a characterisation of newsworkers, reflects the expectations of management, but cannot hide the discontent among journalists. What emerges is an individual who "feels involved in the community, professes the religious values of the whole society, and maintains a deep love and respect for journalism. Many are willing to make personal sacrifices, if necessary, to stay in the newspaper business" (Stinett 1989, 27). Although professional aspirations concern the opportunity to write rather than to occupy an intellectual role that would include "having an impact on society," the accompanying wish list of important tasks is led by analysis and interpretation of complex problems, investigative work, and fast dissemination of information to the public (Stinett 1989, 67). These ideals are severely effected by low pay, lack of recognition and low job satisfaction and the feeling that the press is "adequate, but not outstanding" in its pursuit of community issues. Also, journalists have a weak sense of longevity when it comes to their positions despite better education and job preparation through journalism education. In a nation-wide "newspaper departure" study which suggests that over 60 percent of employees, who leave newspapers also leave the industry, do so for lack of "fairness in promotions; involvement in decision-making; opportunities for advancement; supervisor concern for employees' personal success; fairness in pay; equitable treatment; and contributions in value" (***Editor & Publisher*** 1995, 23).

Some time ago, authors like Breed (1955), Gans (1980), Gitlin (1980), or Sigal (1973) commented on the practices of journalists and their position in newsrooms; together with other, more recent observations or laments they seem to substantiate current findings (e.g., Weaver and Wilhoit 1996) that newsworkers are caught unhappily in a work situation that leaves little room to manoeuvre. Emerging from the practices of contemporary advertising and public relations efforts is the journalism of a new type which promotes the construction of corporate realities at the expense of a commonsense desire for a fair and truthful representation of everyday life. Its ideological role resembles the political task of a Soviet-style press with its specific goals of organising and propagandising the masses for the purposes of maximising socialisation in an effort to centralise political power through participation in the commercialisation of social differences to form a "consumer" culture. In this process, freedom of expression is reconstituted as an institutional right of freedom of the press with claims of representing individual interests that sound not unlike earlier claims of centralised political systems, such as those in Eastern Europe under Soviet rule, to speak collectively for society. It is one of the dangers of the anticipated or realised business mentality of the media that content, which represents an expression of freedom, will be defined by those who seek to serve the public as consumers rather than society as participants and a source of democratic power.

In its ideal version, the press fulfils public duties and pursues private goals as a vehicle of journalism and business; its investment in the social and political life of society, uniquely protected by a constitutional amendment, constitutes a significant contribution to the working of democratic principles regarding the pursuit of knowl-

edge and the need to be informed. In reality, however, the commercial impulse of the press, supported by law and barely controlled by ethical considerations of its owners, also guides journalistic practices, while the desirable balance between responsible journalism and profitable business is rarely accomplished. In fact, contemporary economic and political developments, summarised most appropriately by the notion of "deregulation" — introduced and practised since the Reagan administration — have resulted in the privatisation of public property, like the recent FCC auction of public airwaves, and prepared the stage for the demise of public broadcasting. However, more fundamentally, ideas of responding to public concerns and representing a public trust are being absorbed or replaced by the strength of private interests, signalling the end of government intervention and public control of excessive commercial power. This process confirms an era of privatisation pitched at home and abroad, and particularly in the newly established democracies of Eastern Europe, as the key to a free market system which is flawed by an utter disregard for the public good, including the protection of workers, among them journalists. Media organisations in many parts of the world are heavily effected by these developments in the United States, from where a CNN version of journalism has conquered the global airwaves and makes its endless rounds as media everywhere seem to reconceptualise traditional understandings of news and public responsibility in light of increasing commercialisation while mistaking private enterprise for democratic practice.

Many years ago, television network news departments were considered public service operations and divorced from the profit-driven entertainment divisions until someone recognised the earning potential of news. Likewise, the press is undergoing a substantial changeover under the unofficial leadership of the Gannett newspapers and their successful experiments with translating image and reality of television news onto the printed page, recognising that a target clientele rather than public interest will maximise profits. The result is a significant shift towards the recognition of business interests in the approach to American journalism; first, by management, which used to acknowledge the importance of news and critical analysis as a central mission of the press, and secondly, by newsworkers, whose traditional expectations are redirected to marketing goals.

Pressure from advertisers, long recognised as a hazard of aggressive journalism, has now turned into a regular succession of requests that more often than not leads to co-operation and collaboration as a (community) service. In other words, while none of these occurrences are new — newspapers have dealt with them before — they are now widely received in the form of guided opportunities to help promote business and improve the standing of the press in its community. Such a community, however, is limited to the community of affluent readers and businesses, both major clients of the information industry. Moreover, in a world in which work is disappearing rapidly, according to William Julius Wilson (1996, 133-134), media are being used by corporations to exclude the poor from sharing information about a shrinking workplace by not advertising in black neighbourhoods, for instance, thus, effectively isolating people from jobs and information about them.

Indeed, the press has joined the electronic media, and particularly television, and incorporated older practices of the magazine press, which have been aimed at providing business with a reliable, credible, and effective forum for the dissemination of commercial information. Additional downsizing of media corporations, mega-merg-

ers, and an increasing lack of competitors will strengthen these developments and assure their continuation into the twenty-first century. The losers will be not only newsworkers, who refuse to cooperate or retire from the press, but also the public, which will be robbed of the professional skills of newsworkers to undertake the surveillance of business and politics as a matter of public interest.

Left to their own decisions to manage the future of the press, owners have made a series of decisive moves to remain competitive in the media market and to comply with the demands of their major customers, affluent readers and advertisers. As a result, investigative reporting, analytical writing on social, economic, and political issues, and confrontational stances have been largely replaced by a notoriously placid, if not socially and politically irrelevant coverage of events. David Burnham (1996, 11) suggests that American news organisations "tend to be passive and unreflective. Although independent-minded investigative reporting often is celebrated by journalists, it is in fact a rare phenomenon. Despite the self-congratulatory rhetoric, the basically acquiescent nature of daily journalism is a problem that has long been observed by a handful of astute observers." In addition, there is no review of media practices, amidst a lack of historical consciousness, or a return to self-criticism and welcome public scrutiny of press performances. Thus, Underwood (1993, 133) concludes, "Sadly, there are no signs that newspaper executives — fixated on their own market surveys, financial plans, and budgeting problems — are showing much inclination to scrutinise their counterparts in other industries, let alone the affairs of the media themselves."

Above all, journalistic enterprise (or freedom) is replaced by a strict control of the production line which caters to issues of lifestyles, softnews, and entertainment in response to reader interests. In the course of serving the goals of business, traditional barriers between editorial and advertising departments have been removed with the help of editors who either recruit or order journalists to contribute expertise, including their writing skills, to promotional campaigns. Increasing demands from advertising departments on the labour of journalists have shattered traditional boundaries between editorial responsibilities and advertising sales and lead to reconceptualising journalism, frequently against the will of individual journalists and their understanding of what constitutes professional engagement. Consequently, public relations firms, often staffed with former journalists, produce the news, and journalists, forced to abandon their traditional roles, collaborate in the dissemination of directed information that is created by advertisers and thinly disguised as news. This practice, in particular, has spread to many newspapers, where it replaces journalistic priorities regarding the application of reportage, investigation, and news analysis; it undermines the professional rationale of journalism and leads to increasing job dissatisfaction and unrest among journalists.

At the same time, the prevailing practice of academic journalism programs in the United States reflects a continuing reliance on the notion of professionalism as an organisational category of labour when journalists serve in subordinate roles amidst problems of decreasing job security and changing interpretations of work and professional freedom in their organisational environment. The consequence of such a media-centred definition of professionalism is a qualitative shift from education to training in accordance with a more general trend among colleges and universities to cooperate with the specific demands of business and industry regarding job preparation. Thus, any recognition by media organisations of particular educational institutions as

certified sites of professional instruction reinforces an alliance with media interests rather than with the needs or interests of journalists, who have yet to define an independent, educational agenda that reflects their own understanding of the public role of journalism and the nature of their profession.

Conclusions

These are the conditions of late capitalism under which the press intends to advance for its own benefit and that of its customers when definitions of the role of journalism in American society have been finally rewritten by the public relations practices of the press. The fourth estate model of the press has never been more outdated than in the current era of political and economic dependencies among major institutions in society, when a technology-driven information and entertainment culture has converted the labour process into a limited and highly controlled activity, leading to the homogenisation and degradation of labour, including media, newswork, and journalists, respectively.

Also, the demise of journalism as independent, intellectual labour may also be related to having ignored class positions and embraced assurances of social status, since class and class relations remain significant issues in contemporary considerations of public communication, including journalism (Hardt 1996a; 1996b). Thus, initially journalists shared both, proletarian and bourgeois characteristics and expressed expectations of middleclassness. But amongst celebrations of robust individualism in the liberal/pluralist atmosphere of 1920s America, the struggle over recognising the collective interests of newsworkers was lost to the efforts of media organisations to redefine their work force in terms of professionalism, isolating it successfully from other, non-editorial workers while supporting and reinforcing the denial of economically expressed working-class conditions of newsworkers. In the 1990s, finally, the drawn-out struggle over maintaining the status quo of professionals, including the quasi-independence of editorial work, failed with the adoption of a patronage model of the press; it understands journalistic labour in terms of routinised technical tasks responding to specific commercial interests, such as the production of non-idea, non-event centred narratives. The latter cater to the entertainment interests of consumers, thereby satisfying the demands of advertisers for non-controversial contextual material to help maximise the impact of commercial messages.

Alternative solutions will not be offered by the commercial marketplace; they may be introduced, at best, by a new type of media practice through periodicals or more likely, electronic publications rather than daily newspapers, with the kind of determination and direction that mark ideologically committed journalism capable of providing a point of view for an enlightened readership. It may very well constitute the only viable journalistic alternative based on the quality of information, its sources, and objectives that decide questions of public service and social responsibility. Such a solution, however, also relies on a growing desire of a critical general public for more comprehensive information and analysis, suggesting that the success of journalists depends on the cultural and economic competencies of a democratic society to support its rising need for journalism; it also explains the necessary alliance between journalists and their respective publics for the sake of reclaiming the pivotal role of journalism in the making of democracy. In his latest book, Jürgen Habermas (1996) promotes the idea of a deliberative democracy, based on the centrality of communication,

which embraces equal opportunity, participation, and the autonomous process of forming opinions, as a desirable alternative to existing (and applied) conceptions of democracy. It represents a procedural ideal that promotes an ideal speech situation, the core of his theory of communicative action. Similarly, it could be argued that the inadequacy of existing media theories resides in a failure to rethink relations between media and democracy in terms of the potential of communication as a social process that privileges participation and exchange and the autonomy of journalists; in the latter instance, journalism emerges as a responsive, cultural practice, administered in a professional manner that is successfully insulated from the control of media management and sensitive to the need of public participation in constituting social knowledge.

On the other hand, by becoming their own agents, commercial and government institutions will continue to produce information packages that serve their specific purposes with increasing opportunities for direct access to consumers and citizens and bypassing traditional systems of news processing while challenging alternative sources of information and analysis. In fact, this is the dawn of a new partisanship of traditional media, the result of a larger, political process of bargaining and compromise to promote and protect selfish interests rather than public participation, which will shift the balance between private interest and public responsibility towards a patronage system that considers information a privilege rather than a right as it replaces the spectre of a nineteenth century partisan press. Consequently, a professional vision of journalism ends at a time, when American society needs a critical reportorial force; instead, a new journalism emerges in a form of "mass" communication that will benefit commerce and legitimise the function of advertising in the "commercialisation of culture," as Matthew McAllister (1995) suggests.

Finally, the demise of the fourth estate has been long in coming when one recalls the impressive literature of press criticism that has accompanied the economic and technological developments of the press during the last one hundred years. But while market forces shaped and strengthened the media as a cultural, political, and economic institution in the United States, journalists, whose intellectual labour has lend professional credibility to the process of public enlightenment, have been exchanged for wage labour in the evolution of the information society. Michael Schudson (1995) once declared that news is culture, and therefore apt to change, although he did not know how. The political and economic developments of the last decade, in particular, suggest that news will fit the requirements of a patronage system, in which journalists serve the interests of an affluent and educated commercial class consisting of businesses and their clientele as a new type of partisanship and a new understanding of public interest begin to dominate the public sphere.

Note:

1. The concepts "press" and "media" are used interchangeably in this paper and refer to organizations that provide journalistic services.

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