

# JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY ACROSS BORDERS\*

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After more than half a century<sup>1</sup>, fresh interpretations of the vital importance of journalism for democratic politics have begun to appear. The new thinking began around a decade ago, within a context that was abnormal : the forces of resurgent market liberalism, the decline of public service broadcasting, the global collapse of dictatorships and the outbreak of the so-called ‘catching up’ or ‘velvet’ revolutions of 1989-1991 all conspired to produce important, sometimes bitter policy controversies about the future of journalism and its role in stifling or fostering democratic institutions and ways of life. Especially in Europe, with its strong public broadcasting systems, some observers tried to defend the public service model against threats from both state authoritarianism and the forces of neo-liberal politics<sup>2</sup>, but neo-liberalism forcefully questioned the prevailing modes of state regulation. It quickly captured the high ground of public debate by using terms like state censorship, individual choice, deregulation and market competition to

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<sup>1</sup> The early years after World War Two witnessed many initiatives and new lines of thinking about journalism and the future of democracy within a global context. See for instance Harold Laski et.al. , *The Future of Democracy* (London 1946); Albert Camus, *Neither Victims nor Executioners* (Chicago 1972 [first published in the autumn 1946 issues of *Combat*]); Pope Pius XII, *Democracy and Peace* (London 1945); A.D. Lindsay, *Democracy in the World Today* (London 1945), which discusses the claim (first made by E.H. Carr) that it was Stalin who placed ‘democracy’ in the forefront of Allied war aims by describing (in a radio broadcast of July 3, 1941) the Soviet war against Hitler as ‘merged with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for independence and democratic liberties’.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Garnham, ‘Public Service Versus the Market’, *Screen 24*, 1 (198 6-273), pp. 6-27.

criticize the prevailing mix of public and private communication systems operating within the boundaries of territorial states, whether democratic or not. Its partisans predicted an age of ‘democratic revolution’ and multi-channel communications structured by ‘freedom and choice, rather than regulation and scarcity’ (Rupert Murdoch).<sup>1</sup> Such rhetoric prompted a third approach – a highly original defence of journalism as a tool for the public use and enjoyment of all citizens and not for the private gain or profit of political rulers or businesses.<sup>2</sup> This approach anticipated a genuine commonwealth of different forms of life, tastes and opinions. It sounded utopian, but it saw itself as supported by real technological and social developments, such as multi-channel cable television systems, global satellite communication, the Internet, and the renewal of cross-border relations of civil society. This third approach called for the empowerment of a plurality of citizens who would be governed neither by undemocratic states nor by undemocratic market forces but instead would take advantage of a rich plurality of non-state and non-market media that functioned both as permanent thorns in the side of state power and served as the primary means of communication for citizens living within a diverse and horizontally organized civil society.

When assessing the impact of these three different reactions it seems obvious that everywhere, for the time being, market liberal policies have gained the upper hand in political battles to redefine the field of journalism. This was by no means either guaranteed or inevitable. It has rather been determined by a combination of vast capital assets, persuasive rhetoric, skilful political manoeuvring and a shrewd grasp of the unfolding new communications revolution, whose main feature is the

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<sup>1</sup> See Rupert Murdoch, ‘Freedom in Broadcasting’, MacTaggart Lecture, Edinburgh International Television Festival (Edinburgh, 25 August 1989).

<sup>2</sup> John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Oxford and Cambridge, Ma., 1991).

digital integration of text, sound and image in mobile networks that are accessible through an affordable variety of media, from multiple points, on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> It has also been supported by nearsightedness in journalism scholarship, whose narrow definition of the journalistic profession has failed to grasp the key political, cultural, social, economic, and technological changes – especially the impact of globalization - that have beset journalism.<sup>2</sup> The combined effect has been to underestimate the world-transforming effects of the (potential) communicative abundance that results from such novel technical factors as electronic memory, tighter channel spacing, new frequency allocation, direct satellite broadcasting, digital tuning, and compression techniques. Chief among these factors is the invention and deployment of cable and satellite-linked, computerized communication, which catalyzes both product and process innovations in virtually every field of media. When Diane Keaton told Tony Roberts, her workaholic husband in Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam*, that he should give his office the number of the pay phone they were passing in case they needed him, it was a big joke. Farce in 1973 has become reality. In the space of a few minutes, we know well, an individual somewhere on the face of the earth can send a fax, be paged, access his or her e-mail on a mobile phone, send an e-mail from a personal computer, watch satellite/cable television, channel hop on radio, make a telephone call, read a newspaper, open the day's post, even find time for a face-to-face conversation. Such trends have encouraged talk of universal abundance, which has begun to function as the ideology of computer-linked electronic communications networks. An early example was John Perry Barlow's *A Declaration of the*

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford and Malden, Mass., 1998), especially chapter 5; and *The Internet Galaxy. Refrlections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford and New York 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (New York and London, 2004).

*Independence of Cyberspace*, which claimed that computer-linked networks were creating a ‘global social space’, a border-less ‘global conversation of bits’, a new world ‘that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth’.<sup>1</sup>

### *Journalism and the End of Democracy?*

The growth of a globe-girdling, time-space conquering galaxy of communication is arguably of epochal importance.<sup>2</sup> Communications media like the wheel and the press had distance-shrinking effects, but genuinely globalized communication only began (during the nineteenth century) with inventions like overland and underwater telegraphy and the early development of Reuters and other international news agencies. The process has culminated in the more recent development of wide-footprint geo-stationary satellites, computer-networked media and the expanding and merging flows of international news, electronic data exchange and entertainment and education materials controlled by giant firms like Thorn-EMI, AOL/Time-Warner, News Corporation International, Disney, Bertelsmann, Microsoft, Sony and CNN. These global media linkages have helped to achieve something much more persuasively than the maps of Gerardus Mercator ever did : to deepen the visceral feelings among millions of people (somewhere between five per cent and twenty-five per cent of the world’s population<sup>3</sup>) that our world is ‘one world’, and that this worldly interdependence requires humans to share some responsibility for its fate.

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<sup>1</sup> John Perry Barlow, *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* (February 8, 1996), at <http://www.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>

<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications Since 1844. Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore and London 1999).

<sup>3</sup> John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge and New York 2003), pp. 16-17.

What role can and should journalism play in this process? Contemporary journalism theory is often cocooned in assumptions about the primacy of territorial state institutions, yet it is worth noting that theories of how journalism should work have long supposed that interdependence and shared responsibility among citizens who are otherwise separated by geographic distance is an optimum goal. Think of earlier commentators as wide-ranging as Alexis de Tocqueville, Gabriel Tarde, Ferdinand Tönnies, John Dewey, and Walter Lippmann : all of them variously argued that journalism should serve ‘the public’ and could best do so by molding socially disparate and geographically dispersed populations into publics united around shared concerns, or at the very least into publics who interacted with journalism in a predictive and patterned fashion.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, the Hutchins Report briefly mentioned the need for government to foster more worldly forms of journalism by using its influence in various ways : for instance, to reduce the costs of entry into communications markets, to break down barriers to the free and equal flow of information, and to collaborate with the United Nations in promoting the widest dissemination of cross-border news and discussion.<sup>2</sup> The leap from thinking that is attached to state-framed democracies to an understanding of the global role that can be played by journalism was also implicit in the classic textbook of that same period, *Four Theories of the Press*.<sup>3</sup> Adopting a Cold War perspective on journalism, it looked to the free flow of information as a medicine for the world’s ills. The

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *L’opinion et la foule* (Paris 1898). Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York 1945), volume 1, chapter 11; Ferdinand Tönnies, “The Power and Value of Public Opinion,” in Werner J. Cahnman and Rudolf Heberle (eds.), *Ferdinand Toennies on Sociology*. University of Chicago Press (Chicago and London 1971), pp. 251-265; John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York 1927); Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York 1922).

<sup>2</sup> The Commission on Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press* (Chicago 1947), pp.90 and p. 4, where the duty of a ‘free press’ is said to include the creation of ‘a world community by giving men [sic] everywhere knowledge of the world and of one another’.

<sup>3</sup> Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Oxford and New York 1956).

approach sketched a set of optimum conditions for journalism to function in different geo-political regions. It focussed on patterns of ownership, licensing, regulation, and censorship in order to offer a typology for delineating different ways in which to connect journalism and government. The whole approach of *Four Theories of the Press* has subsequently been criticized heavily in various ways<sup>1</sup>, but what is striking is just how little attention has been paid to its deep normative presumptions about the desirability of a free flow of communication promoted by global markets, helped along by bodies such as GATT, UNESCO and other agencies of the United Nations. The key question prompted by the *Four Theories of the Press* consequently remains poorly addressed in journalism theory : is there evidence that journalism and democracy can positively coexist in an age of global communication?

While it is today generally acknowledged that the accelerating growth of global media linkages has profound implications for journalism, it is much less certain that the whole process has an elective affinity with democratic institutions and ways of life. Though critics and commentators alike seem to agree that global media networks foster a common sense of worldly interdependence, some observers of the government/press linkage ask : what kind of worldly interdependence are we talking about? They note that today's global communications system is an integral - aggressive and oligopolistic - sector of the turbo-capitalist system that now operates as a global system.<sup>2</sup> Ten or so vertically

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs* (London 1984); James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility* (London 1985); Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory* (London 1987); John Nerone (ed), *Last Rights: Revisiting the Four Theories of the Press* (Carbondale 1995); and John Merrill and John Nerone, "The Four Theories of the Press Four and a Half Decades Later: A Retrospective," *Journalism Studies*, 3, 1 (February 2002), pp. 133-136.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'turbocapitalism' is drawn from Edward Luttwak, *Turbo-capitalism. Winners and Losers in the Global Economy* (New York 1999) and developed in different directions in my *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge and New York 2003), especially pp. 65 ff.

integrated media conglomerates, most of them based in the United States, dominate the world market.<sup>1</sup> Pace-setters in a new species of private enterprise driven by the desire for emancipation from social custom, territorial state interference, taxation restrictions, trade union intransigence, and all other external restrictions upon the free movement of capital in search of profit, these global media conglomerates kick against the so-called ‘law’ (formulated by the nineteenth-century economist Adolph Wagner<sup>2</sup>) of the expanding public sector. Their chief executives and shareholders push for a new global regulatory regime – for lighter and more flexible regulation, on a global scale.<sup>3</sup> Media business is no longer exclusively ‘homespun’ (to use Keynes’s famous term for describing territorially bound, state-regulated markets). Bursting the bounds of time and space, language and custom, media business is instead transformed into complex global commodity chains, or global flows of information, staff, money, components and products. Not surprisingly, the journalism associated with the global media conglomerates gives priority to advertising-driven, commercial ventures : to saleable music, videos, sports, shopping, children’s and adults’ filmed entertainment. Programme-making codes, in the field of satellite television news for instance, are consequently biased along turbo-capitalist lines. They are subject to specific rules of market *mise-en-scene*. Special emphasis is given to ‘news-breaking’ and ‘block-busting’ stories that concentrate upon accidents, disasters, political crises and the histrionics and cruelties of war. The material that is fed to editors by journalists reporting from or around trouble spots (‘clusterfucks’ as they

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<sup>1</sup> R. Burnett, *The Global Jukebox* (London 1996); A Mohammadie (ed.), *International Communication and Globalization* (London 1997); and Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, *The Global Media : The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism* (London and Washington 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Adolph Wagner, *Die Ordnung des österreichischen Staatshaushalts* (Vienna 1863)

<sup>3</sup> Miles Kahler, *International Institutions and the Political Economy of Integration* (Washington 1995), especially chapter 2.

are called in the trade) is meanwhile shortened, simplified, repackaged and transmitted in commercial form. Staged sound-bites and ‘live’ or lightly-edited material are editors’ favourites; so, too, are ‘flashy’ presentational technologies, including the use of logos, rapid visual cuts, and ‘stars’ who are placed centre-stage. News exchange arrangements – whereby subscribing news organizations exchange visual footage and other material – then complete the picture, ensuring a substantial homogenisation of news stories in many parts of the globe, circulated at the speed of light.

These trends lead some observers to draw pessimistic conclusions. Far from nurturing democracy, they say, global journalism produces bland commercial pulp for audiences who are politically comatose. They warn of the *embourgeoisement* of the brain. They insist that American-style, turbo-capitalist culture is becoming universal because it is universally present. Algerian-desert dwellers smoke Marlboro. Nigerian tribespeople huddle around their televisions watching hand-me-down Dallas. Chinese peasants and workers meanwhile dream of owning and driving a Chrysler. Everybody who lives within global civil society is put under great pressure to adopt more or less unaffordable turbocapitalist living standards that are adjusted to local conditions, many of them originally American, like automobility, Windows XP, Nike trainers, skateboards, Mastercards, shopping malls, and endless chatter about ‘choice’. If during the eighteenth century a cosmopolitan was typically someone who thought *à la française*, who in other words identified Paris with cosmopolis, then three centuries later, thanks to turbo-capitalism, a cosmopolitan is turning out to be someone whose tastes are fixated on New York and Washington, Los Angeles and Seattle. Turbo-capitalism produces ‘McWorld’ : a universal tribe of consumers who dance to the



music of logos, advertising slogans, sponsorship, brand names, trademarks and jingles<sup>1</sup>. ‘The dictatorship of the single word and the single image, much more devastating than that of the single party’, laments Eduardo Galeano, ‘imposes a life whose exemplary citizen is a docile consumer and passive spectator built on the assembly line following the North American model of commercial television.’<sup>2</sup> Using ugly words, others express similar anxieties about the ‘monoculture of the mind’ (Vandana Shiva) or ‘global cultural homogenization’ in the form of ‘transnational corporate cultural domination’ : a world in which ‘private giant economic enterprises pursue – sometimes competitively, sometimes co-operatively – historical capitalist objectives of profit making and capital accumulation, in continuously changing market and geopolitical conditions.’<sup>3</sup> The net effect is a silent takeover of the world, such that ‘consumerism is equated with economic policy, where corporate interests reign, where corporations spew their jargon on to the airwaves and stifle nations with their imperial rule. Corporations have become behemoths, huge global giants that wield immense political power.’<sup>4</sup>

Such laments correctly warn of the dangers of *communication poverty* and *market censorship* that result from market-driven forms of media. Market forces serve as a structure of constraint in matters of

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld : How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Eduardo Galeano, cited as the epigram in Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, *The Global Media : The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, *op. cit.*, p. vi. More prudent assessments are presented in Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship : The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham 1999); Richard Packer, *Mixed Signals : The Prospects for Global Television News* (New York 1995); Michael Schudson, ‘Is There a Global Cultural Memory?’, unpublished paper (University of California at San Diego, 1997); and Mike Featherstone, ‘Localism, globalism and cultural identity’, in R. Wilson and W. Dissanayake (eds.), *Global-Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (New York 1996), pp.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Schiller, ‘Not yet the post-industrial era’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, volume 8 (1991), pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> Noreena Hertz, *The Silent Takeover. Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (London 2001), p. 8

communication in two ways. The first trouble with market competition is this : it necessarily produces losers. The cruel facts of communication poverty are common knowledge : three-quarters of the world's population (now totalling 6 billion) are too poor to buy a book; a majority have never made a phone call in their lives; and only one or two per cent currently have access to the Internet.<sup>1</sup> From their side, the excluded 'participate' within the global communications industry in a derivative, minimal sense : thanks to aid programmes, television and Hollywood films, they know something about the lives of the rich and powerful of the world. Struggling to make ends meet, they are aware of how insubstantial is their share of the world's wealth and power and style. They sense that their lives are permanently under the shadow of 'Westerners' and things 'Western'. They are subjected to crude and aggressive prejudices of those who shadow them. They feel scorned, as if they are the 'wrongful' majority. They know that being marginal means being condemned to a much shorter life. They are made to feel like victims of a predatory mode of foreign intervention : they feel shut out from global civil society, or uprooted by its dynamism, or imprisoned within its discriminatory structures and policies, like unpayable debt-service payments, or victimised by scores of uncivil wars.<sup>1</sup> Others – many Muslims say – feel profound disappointment, tinged with anger. They reason that the enormous potential of global journalism to expand dialogue among civilizations, to 'affirm differences through communication', is being choked to death by the combined forces of global markets and military might, manifested for instance in the repression of independent journalism throughout the Middle East and the dangerous and long-

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<sup>1</sup> John Keane, *On Communicative Abundance* (London 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Fred R. Dallmayr, 'Globalization from below', *International Politics* 36 (September 1999), pp.321-334, Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization. A Critique* (Oxford 1999), chapter 8; and Orhan Pamuk, 'The Anger of the Damned', *The New York Review of Books*, November 15, 2001, p. 12.

standing alliance between the United States and Israel<sup>1</sup>. Still others are gripped by feelings of humiliation : the sense of being crushed into the impotence that stems from the failure to be understood, the simple inability to make their voices heard, to be recognized as the potential makers of their own histories. Then, finally, there are the damned who curse quietly or express open hatred for this civil society – or who join Dostoevsky’s underground man by drawing the defiant conclusion, against all things ‘reasonable’ and ‘Western’, that two plus two indeed equals five. From there, it may be only a step or two to picking up a gun or detonating bombs – to fight for the cause of ridding the world of the hypocrisy and decadence of an immediate aggressor, or a pseudo-universal way of life.

Seen from this angle, the global journalism associated with such companies as AOL/Time-Warner and News Corporation International seems to give the upper hand to the wants and desires of certain groups, like those with large advertising budgets or those with enough capital to acquire and run a newspaper, a global television network, or mobile telephone system. This brings us to the second way in which, in matters of editorial and programming plans and decisions, media markets limit communication : they privilege certain criteria, such as profitability and allocative efficiency, at the expense of others like experimental creativity or equality of representation. Pop videos, gardening programmes and cheap reruns of *Bonanza* or *Hill Street Blues* may be low cost and high profit, but there is no necessary or even probabilistic relationship between them and the democratic principle of guaranteeing citizens equal chances of voicing concerns and affecting policy decisions. Corporate power can indeed pose as great a threat to democracy and freedom of

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Professor Abou Yaareb al-Marzouki, Hammamet, Tunisia, April 18 2001.

communication as governmental power : communications markets can and do restrict freedom and equality of communication by generating barriers to entry, monopoly and restrictions upon choice, and by shifting the prevailing definition of communication from that of a publicly useful and publicly meaningful good to that of *commercial speech* and the consumption of privately appropriable commodities. <sup>1</sup>

The case against straightforward accounts of market-driven journalism as the guarantor of democratic openness is strong. Yet there are problems lurking within broadsides against commodity production and exchange in the field of communication. In the American context, for instance, the organized filtering of text, sound and images to and from local and planetary *milieux* through privately-controlled but outward-looking newspaper media such as the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times* and the *Washington Post* does not automatically or crudely work in favour of the turbo-capitalist system. Along with governments and social movements and civic initiatives, the global journalism associated with these media has helped lay the foundations of a global civil society that, although structured in part by large media conglomerates, is a basic precondition of nurturing democracy within and across borders, at the global level.<sup>2</sup> The general point is this : the rise of a global communications infrastructure does not straightforwardly result in ‘global cultural homogenization’. It tends rather to have the effect of *accentuating* social diversity and visible social controversies within the emergent global civil society. Partly this is due to a fertile paradox : commercial journalism sometimes best serves its democratic obligations

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<sup>1</sup> See Owen Fiss, ‘Why the state?’, in Judith Lichtenberg (ed.), *Democracy and the mass media* (Cambridge and New York 1990), pp. 136-154; and John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Oxford and Cambridge, Ma., 1991), especially pp. 51-92.

<sup>2</sup> John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge and New York 2003).

by following its mercenary instinct of outdoing competitors by being at the right place at the right time when a surprising revelation surfaces or an unanticipated event happens.<sup>1</sup> The accentuation of social differences is also due to the fact that profit-seeking media firms see the need to tailor their journalistic products to local conditions and tastes (hence the Coca-Cola advertisement: ‘We are not a multinational, we are a multi-local’). Local consumers of commercial journalism reciprocate : they display vigorous powers of reinterpreting these commodities, of giving them new and different meanings. True, globally marketed media culture is not the product of an equal contribution of all who are party to it, or exposed to it. Few are consulted in its manufacture – and yet, despite everything, that culture, disproportionately Atlantic in style and content, remains permanently vulnerable to the *universal* power of audiences to make and take meanings from it. The American golfer and media star Tiger Woods, who once described himself as ‘Cablinasian’ (a blend of Caucasian, black, Indian and Asian), is one symbol of this power<sup>2</sup>. Boundary crossing cultural mixtures – ‘creolisation’ in the form of chop suey, Irish bagels, Hindi Rap, Sri Lankan cricket, ‘queer *jihad*’, veiled Muslim women logging on to the Internet, the fusion of classical European, aboriginal and Japanese themes in the scores of Peter Sculthorpe – are consequently widespread. Examples of the survival and flourishing of diasporic culture are also commonplace. So too are the examples of contra-flow, the commercial global successes of cultural products from peripheral contexts – like Iranian and Chinese films, Brazilian telenovelas (exported to more than 80 countries) and the Mexican soap opera ‘Los Ricos Tambien Lloran’ (‘The Rich Also Cry’), which was among the biggest television hits in early post-communist Russia. The consequence :

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schudson, ‘For A Few Dollars More’, *Financial Times Magazine* (July 31, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 24 April 1997, p. 3.

in social terms, the global civil society in which global journalism operates is a hodge-podge of nested spaces marked by various blends and combinations, fusions and disjunctions.

The new global journalism, when it performs well, has similar characteristics. It includes all those forms of journalism that recognize that the borders between ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ are negotiable and subject permanently to osmosis. Global journalism is more or less aware of its dependence upon global dynamics – and thus sees itself as contributing positively to citizens’ understanding of the push-pull processes of global interdependence, conflict and compromise that stretch from local milieux to the four corners of the earth, and back again. Within the United States, there are plenty of examples of the conscious melding of global forms and themes with localized interests : CNN’s *World Report*, begun as five hours a week of material submitted by 100 broadcast stations around the world, some professional and some amateur, and facilitated ironically by Ted Turner’s now legendary prohibition of the word “foreign” on air; the tailoring or ‘glocalization’ of Spanish-language news magazines to diverse regional areas elsewhere in the world; the growing diversification of information supplied by tabloids, Internet chats, and web-logs<sup>1</sup>; and the journalistic outliers that cater to younger publics like *The Daily Show* and *MTV News*. Such forms of global journalism are now deeply rooted within the American context, but they suffer certain problems. The fusions they produce do not always push toward journalism’s more optimum forms, and there are those who argue that the less endowed versions – local American news, for example

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<sup>1</sup> See the preliminary findings of the World Internet Project (UCLA 2004), <http://ccp.ucla.edu/pages/internet-report.asp>

– have responded by *shrinking* the horizons of their audiences.<sup>1</sup> Exposed to or dependent upon local ‘content engine’ newspapers like *The Desert Sun* in Palm Springs, Cheyenne’s *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle* or Pensacola’s *Gulf Herald*, citizens are fed a starvation diet of global stories, which typically occupy no more than about 2% of column space. Reduced budgets for ‘foreign’ news, an overloaded dependence on English-language-dominated, wire-service reporting or regional news exchanges, and a reliance on field producers acting as journalists are all said to contribute to this trend. The globalization of news is also restricted primarily to the wire services, seen as the first global news agent,<sup>2</sup> and to broadcast or cable news organizations; largely excluded from the global stretching of horizons are the tabloids, the specialized press, and the journals of opinion, to name just a few. Governments equipped with ‘flack packs’ and dissimulation experts then handle the rest : by cultivating links with trusted or ‘embedded’ journalists and by organizing press briefings and advertising campaigns, they ‘frame’ – or distort and censor - global events to suit current government policies.

### *Global Publics*

Such details provide a sober reminder of how global journalism looks from the bottom up – from the point of view of most citizens. Yet this is not the whole story. There are signs that the grip of parochialism upon citizens is not absolute, and that from roughly around the time of the world-wide protest of youth against the Vietnam War the globalization of journalism has had an unanticipated *political* effect : it has slowly but surely contributed to the growth of a plurality of differently sized public

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Kaniss, *Making Local News* (Chicago 1991); Bob Franklin and David Murphy (eds.), *Making the Local News*. (London and New York 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen (eds.), *The Globalization of News* (London 1998).

spheres, some of them genuinely global, in which many millions of people scattered across the earth witness mediated controversies about who gets what, when, and how on a world scale.<sup>1</sup>

How does global journalism work to produce such effects? Put simply, it creates global products for imagined global audiences : global journalism simultaneously supposes and nurtures a world stage or *theatrum mundi*. There is something necessary about this development, in that journalists, publishers and broadcasters must always and everywhere presuppose the existence of ‘a public’ that is listening, reading, watching, chatting, on- or off-line. Journalists know that witnesses of media programmes and outputs are required – that these outputs cannot play for long to an empty house. Of course, not all global media events - sporting fixtures, blockbuster movies, media awards, for instance - sustain global public spheres, which is to say that audiences are not publics and public spheres are not simply domains of entertainment or play. Strictly speaking, they are scenes of the political : within their imagined bounds, power conflicts and controversies erupt and unfold before millions of eyes and ears. These scenes are made possible by wide-bodied jet aircraft, computerised communications and satellite broadcasting with large footprints, thanks to which the journalistic practice of non-violently monitoring the exercise of governmental and non-governmental power across borders has taken root. These global public spheres are sites within global civil society where power struggles are visibly waged and witnessed by means other than violence and war : they are the narrated, imagined, non-violent spaces within global civil society in which millions of people at various points

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<sup>1</sup> See John Keane, ‘Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere’, *The Communication Review*, volume 1, number 1 (1995), pp. 1-22. Adam Michnik has suggested that the recent growth of global public opinion can be seen as the rebirth in different form of an earlier parallel trend, evident within nineteenth-century suffragette and socialist internationalism, that came to an end with World War One and its aftermath (interview, Washington, D.C., April 21 2001).



on the earth witness the powers of governmental and non-governmental organizations being publicly named, monitored, praised, challenged, and condemned by journalists, in defiance of the old tyrannies of time and space and publicly unaccountable power.

It is true that global public spheres are still rather issue-driven and better at presenting effects than probing the intentions of actors and the structural causes of events. Global public life is also highly vulnerable to implosion : especially vulnerable to state interference,<sup>1</sup> it is neither strongly institutionalised nor effectively linked to mechanisms of representative government. It is a voice without a coherent body politic. Yet in spite of everything, global public spheres have begun to affect the suit-and-tie worlds of diplomacy, global business, inter-governmental meetings and independent non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Helped along by initiatives like the Internet-based Earth Watch, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the public accountability initiative called Transparency International, and by around-the-clock broadcasting organizations like CNN (available in over 800 million households and many thousands of hotels), the BBC World Service (which attracts 150 million viewers and listeners each week), and Al Jazeera (with a weekly audience of 40 million people currently served by 56 correspondents in 37 bureaux), global publics have begun to ‘bite’ into various domestic settings. Few of the effects of global publics are reducible to the dynamics of rational-critical argumentation about matters of sober truth and calm agreement, although this sometimes happens.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Monroe Price, *Media and Sovereignty. The Global Information Revolution and Its Challenge to State Power* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2002); and Nancy Morris and Silvio Waisbord (eds.), *Media and Globalization. Why the State Matters* (Lanham, MD 2002)

<sup>2</sup> Some limits of the rational communication model of the public sphere, originally outlined in the important work of Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit : Untersuchungen einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied 1962), are sketched in John Durham Peters,

Some of their effects are ‘meta-political’, in the sense that the increased visibility of global publics works in favour of *creating* citizens of the new global order, in effect telling them that unless they find some means of showing that the wider world is not theirs, then it is. In this way, by calling citizens to pay attention to global dynamics, global public spheres function as temporary resting places or ‘cities of refuge’ (Derrida) beyond familiar horizons; they give an entirely new meaning to the old watchword of Greek colonisation, ‘Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*’. ‘Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth’, wrote Heidegger<sup>1</sup>, but the implication in that passage that mortals are bound to geographic place misses the new spatial polygamy that global publics make possible. Within global public spheres, thanks to global journalism, people rooted in local physical settings increasingly travel to distant places, without ever leaving home, to ‘second homes’ within which their senses are stretched. They live locally, and think and act globally.

Thanks to journalistic narratives that address their audiences and probe the wider world in intimate (if ironic or hostile) tones, the participants of global civil society become a bit less parochial, a bit more cosmopolitan. This is no small achievement, especially considering that people do not ‘naturally’ feel a sense of responsibility for faraway events. Ethical responsibility often stretches no farther than their noses. Yet when they are engaged by journalistic stories that originate in other contexts – when they are drawn into the dynamics of a global public sphere – their interest is not based simply on prurience, or idle curiosity, or *Schadenfreude*. They rather align and assimilate these stories in terms of their own

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‘Distrust of representation : Habermas on the public sphere’, *Media, Culture and Society*, volume 15 (1993), pp. 541-571, and John Keane, ‘Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere’, *op. cit.*

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York 1982), p. 146.

existential concerns, which are thereby altered. The world ‘out there’ – whether it is some person or place in Iraq, or South Africa or Brazil – becomes ‘their’ world. Those who are caught up within global publics are taught lessons in the art of what can be called *post-national citizenship* : they learn that the boundaries between native and foreigner are blurred, that their commitments have become a touch more multiversal. They become footloose. They are here and there; they learn to distance themselves from themselves; they discover that there are different temporal rhythms, other places, other problems, other ways to live. They are invited to question their own dogmas, even to extend ordinary standards of civility - courtesy, politeness, respect - to others whom they will never meet.<sup>1</sup> Global public spheres centred on groundbreaking media events like Live-Aid (in 1985 it attracted an estimated one billion viewers) can even be spaces of fun, in which millions taste something of the joy of acting publicly with and against others for some defined common purpose. Global publics, staged for instance in the form of televised world news of the suffering of distant strangers, as in the photos from Abu Ghraib prison, or of multimedia initiatives in campaigns of the kind that led to the UN Declaration for the Elimination of Violence Against Women<sup>2</sup>, can also highlight cruelty. Global publics can also function as a ‘gathering of the afraid’ (Patočka), as sites of disaster, spaces in which millions taste unjust outcomes, bitter defeat, and the tragedy of ruined lives. Whatever the case, the old motto that half the world does not know how the other half lives is no longer true. Media representation spreads awareness of others’ damned fates. True, witnessing the pain of others often produces numbing effects, by which

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Toulmin’s useful reflections on civility as the antidote to dogma in ‘The Belligerence of Dogma’, in Leroy S. Rounder (ed.), *Civility* (Notre Dame 2000), pp. 94-100.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Bunch et. al., ‘International Networking for Women’s Human Rights’, in Michael Edwards and John Gaventa (eds.), *Global Citizen Action* (Boulder 2001), pp. 217-229.

the act of seeing substitutes for other more active modes of public response.<sup>1</sup> The portrayal of disasters through global journalism nevertheless does not (automatically, or on a large scale) produce ethically cleansed cynics, lovers of entertainment sitting on sofas, enjoying every second of the blood and tears. The publics that gather around the stages of cruelty and humiliation scrap the old rule that good and evil are typically local affairs. These publics make possible what Hannah Arendt once called the ‘politics of pity’<sup>2</sup> : by witnessing others’ terrible suffering, at a distance, millions are sometimes shaken and disturbed, sometimes to the point where they are prepared to exercise their sense of long-distance responsibility by speaking to others, donating money or time, or supporting the general principle that the right of humanitarian intervention – the obligation to assist someone in danger, as contemporary French law puts it – can and should override the old crocodilian formula that might equals right.

Global public spheres have other political effects. Especially during dramatic media events - like the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl, the Tiananmen massacre, the 1989 revolutions in central-eastern Europe, the overthrow and arrest of Slobodan Milosevic, the terrorist attacks on New York, Pennsylvania and Washington - public spheres intensify audiences’ shared sense of living their lives contingently, on a knife edge, in the subjunctive tense. The witnesses of such events (contrary to McLuhan and others) do not enter a ‘global village’ dressed in the skins of humankind and thinking in the terms of a primordial ‘village or tribal

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<sup>1</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera’s Eye* (Chicago and London 1998). See also Barbie Zelizer, “Journalism, Photography, and Trauma,” in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (eds.), *Journalism After September 11* (London and New York 2002), pp. 48-68.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth 1990), pp. 59-114; and the development of Arendt’s idea by Luc Boltanski, *La Souffrance à Distance* (Paris 1993) and Clifford Christians and Kaarle Nordenstreng, ‘Social Responsibility Worldwide’, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 19, 1 (2004), pp. 3-28.

outlook'<sup>1</sup>. As members of a public sphere, audiences do not experience uninterrupted togetherness. They instead come to feel that the power relations of global civil society, far from being given, are better understood as 'an arena of struggle, a fragmented and contested area'<sup>2</sup>, the resultant of moves and counter-moves, controversy and consent, compromise and resistance, peace and war. Public spheres, backed by global journalism, not only tend to denature the power relations of global civil society and the conglomeration of variously-sized and variously-shaped governing institutions that straddle the earth. They most definitely increase their self-reflexivity, for instance by publicizing conflicting images of government and civil society. Publicity is given as well to the biased codes of global journalistic coverage - as can be seen, for instance, in the ongoing tit-for-tat conflicts between Al Jazeera and American television news media coverage of the recent invasion of Iraq.

In these various ways, global journalism heightens the topsy-turvy feel of our world. Doubt is heaped upon loose talk that anthropomorphizes global civil society, as if it were a universal object/subject, the latest and most promising substitute for the proletariat, or for the wretched of the earth. Global public spheres make it clearer that 'global civil society', like its more local counterparts, has no 'collective voice', that it is full of networks, flows, disjunctions, frictions, that it alone does nothing, that only its constituent individuals, group initiatives, organisations and

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<sup>1</sup> See the introduction to Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (eds.), *Explorations in Communication* (Boston 1966), p. xi : 'Postliterate man's [sic] electronic media contract the world to a village or tribe where everything happens to everyone at the same time : everyone knows about, and therefore participates in, everything that is happening the minute it happens...This simultaneous sharing of experiences as in a village or tribe creates a village or tribal outlook, and puts a premium on togetherness.'

<sup>2</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca and London 1998), p. 33.

networks act and interact. Global publics consequently heighten the sense that the socio-economic and political-legal institutions of our world are an unfinished - permanently threatened - project. They shake up its dogmas and inject it with energy. They enable citizens of the world to shrug off their insularity, to see that talk of global civil society is not simply Western turbo-capitalist ideology - even to appreciate that the task of painting a much clearer picture of the contours and dynamics of global civil society, a picture that is absent from most of the current literature on globalization, is today an urgent ethical imperative.

### *Cosmocracy*

The contemporary growth of global journalism and global publics certainly points to the need to bring greater democracy to the global order.<sup>1</sup> Not only are there vast numbers of non-governmental organizations that know little or nothing of democratic procedures and manners. The world is structured as well by an agglomeration of governmental structures – a cosmocracy comprising bodies like the European Union, the United Nations, the World Bank - that defies the textbooks of traditional political science and political theory.<sup>1</sup> Its clumsy, dynamic, world-wide webs of more or less joined-up government and law interact, and have social and political effects, on a global scale. Many of the structures of the cosmocracy escape the constraining effects of electoral and parliamentary supervision – it is full of what the English call ‘rotten boroughs’ – which is why the sceptics of extending democratic procedures and ways of life across territorial state borders raise strong objections. Consider the doubts of the doyen of democratic thought in the United States, Robert Dahl, who considers as utterly unrealistic the vision

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<sup>1</sup> See John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge and New York 2003), pp. 175 ff.

of democracy beyond state borders.<sup>1</sup> The growing complexity of decision making, for instance in the field of foreign affairs, renders impossible the ‘public enlightenment’ so necessary for democracy. Meanwhile, legal and illegal immigration combined with a new politics of identity within and beyond territorial states lead to growing ‘cultural diversity and cleavages’, which undermine ‘civil discourse and compromise’, Dahl says. World-wide threats of terrorist attacks make it even less likely that civil and political liberties could flourish within ‘international organizations’.

Dahl’s doubts about the potential to create democratic mechanisms that can monitor power exercised across borders are overdrawn, if only because they ignore a fundamental development of our times : the emergence of a global civil society and the birth of global journalism and global publics with power-monitoring potential. Global publics have important implications for democratic theory and practice. By throwing light on power exercised by moonlight, or in the dark of night, global publics and the global journalism that supports them stretch citizens’ horizons of responsibility for what goes on in the world. They keep alive words like freedom and justice by publicizing manipulation, skulduggery and brutality in other countries. Global publics, of the kind that in recent years have monitored the fates of Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Yasser Arafat or George W. Bush, muck with the messy business of exclusion, racketeering, ostentation, cruelty, and war. They chart cases of intrigue and double-crossing. They help audiences to spot the various figures of top-down power on the world scene : slick and suave managers and professionals who are well-practiced at the art of deceiving others

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Dahl, ‘The Past and Future of Democracy’, revised manuscript version of a lecture at the symposium, *Politics from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (University of Siena, October 14-16 1999); and *On Democracy* (New Haven and London 1998), pp. 114-117.

through images; kingfishers who first dazzle others then stumble when more is required of them; fools who prey on their citizens' fears; quislings who willingly change sides under pressure; thugs who love violence; and vulgar rulers, with their taste for usurping crowns, assembling and flattering crowds, or beating and tear-gassing them into submission.

Global journalism and global public spheres can also probe the powers of key organizations of global civil society itself. While the multiple voices of this society function as vital checks and balances in the overall process of globalization, very few of the social organizations from which these voices emanate are democratic<sup>1</sup>. Publicity can serve as a reminder to the world that these organizations often violate the principle of public accountability. Reminders are served to those who read, listen and watch that its empty spaces have been filled by powerful but publicly unaccountable organizations (such as the International Olympic Committee) or by profit-seeking corporate bodies (like Monsanto) that permanently aggravate global civil society by causing environmental damage, or swallowing up others by producing just for profit, rather than for sustainable social use. Global publics backed by global journalism can help to expose malfeasance – accounting and stock market frauds of the kind (in the United States, during 2002) that rocked the industrial conglomerate Tyco International, the energy trader Enron, the cable company Adelphia, and the telecommunications giant WorldCom. Global journalism can as well help question some of the more dubious practices

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<sup>1</sup> The exclusion of the theme of public spheres from virtually all of the current literature on globalization is criticised by Tore Slaatta, 'Media and democracy in the global order', *Media, Culture and Society*, volume 20 (1998), pp. 335-344. A similar point is made implicitly by Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', *Public Culture*, 12, 1 (2000), pp. 1-19

<sup>1</sup> See the important introductory remarks by Michael Edwards in Michael Edwards and John Gaventa (eds.), *Global Citizen Action* (Boulder 2001), especially pp. 6-8.



of some non-profit INGOs : for instance, their lingering colonialist habit of behaving like missionaries; their bureaucratic inflexibility and context-blindness; their spreading attachment to market values or to clichés of project-speak; or their mistaken belief in the supply-side, trickle-down model of social development.<sup>1</sup>

Exactly because of their propensity to monitor the exercise of power from a variety of sites within and outside civil society, global journalism - when it functions well - puts matters like representation, accountability and legitimacy on the political agenda. It poses questions like : who benefits and who loses from global civil society? Who currently speaks for whom in the multiple and overlapping power structures of global civil society? Whose voices are heard, or half-heard, and whose interests and concerns are ignominiously shoved aside? How could there be greater equality among the voices that emerge from the nooks and crannies of this society? And through which institutional procedures could these voices be represented? By formulating such questions, sometimes succinctly, global journalism can help to ensure that nobody monopolizes power at the local and world levels. By exposing corrupt or risky dealings and naming them as such; by catching out decision makers and forcing their hands; by requiring them to rethink or reverse their decisions, global journalism helps remedy the problem - strongly evident in the volatile field of global financial markets, which on an average day turn over something like US \$1.3 trillion, 100 times the volume of world trade - that nobody seems to be in charge. And in uneven contests between

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these undemocratic tendencies within non-governmental organisations – satirized in the South African joke that those lucky to have an NGO job can ‘EN-J-OY’ life – are discussed in Stephen N. Ndegwa, *The Two Faces of Civil Society. NGOs and Politics in Africa* (West Hartford, Connecticut, 1996), especially chapter 6; Brian H. Smith, *More than Altruism : The Politics of Private Foreign Aid* (Princeton 1990); and Steven Sampson, ‘The Social Life of Projects’, in Chris Han and Elizabeth Dunn (eds.), *Civil Society : Challenging Western Models* (London 1996).

decision makers and decision takers – the ongoing corruption scandals within the International Olympic Committee or European Union controversies about American foreign policy are examples - global journalism and its publics can help to prevent the powerful from ‘owning’ power privately. At its best, global journalism and its publics imply greater parity. They suggest that there are alternatives. They inch our little blue and white planet towards greater openness and humility, potentially to the point where power, whenever and wherever it is exercised across borders, is made to feel more ‘biodegradable’, a bit more responsive to those whose lives it shapes and reshapes, secures or wrecks.

### *The Future?*

Does democracy have a chance of taking root in the emerging global order? And can theories of journalism account for its capacity to do so? When considering these questions and the possible answers they prompt it is imperative to remember that democracy - a form of rule in which nobody privately owns the means of ruling - is neither a fixed set of institutions nor the monopoly of any people or country of the world. The history of democratic innovation since the middle of the eighteenth century has been a polymorphic and multi-continental process. The word democracy was first positively redefined under modern conditions in the Low Countries, in the 1580s. Swedish republicans and Philadelphian revolutionaries were responsible for kick-starting the trend towards written constitutions. Denmark abolished its slave trade well before the English did the same; and Haiti and newly independent Spanish American states abolished slavery well before the United States, some of whose states pioneered the abolition of property qualifications for voting. The uniform adoption of the secret ballot first happened in Australia;

Pitcairn Islanders and New Zealanders and Finns witnessed the first national breakthrough for the women's suffrage movement; and so on.

Not only is it important to regard democracy as an open-ended political project – to grasp that the procedures for making power publicly accountable can take many different forms. It is also vital to remember that in matters of democracy absolutely nothing should be taken for granted. There are no historical laws working in its favour. Democratic institutions and democratic spirit can be made and – far more easily – unmade. That is why, in our times, the strange elusiveness of the democratic ideal should be kept in mind. Efforts to bring greater democracy into the world need to understand its uniqueness within the history of different types of earthly regimes. Exactly because it means, minimally, the self-government of equals – their freedom from bossing, injustice and violence – it regularly demands more than humans seem willing or are capable of giving. What we call democracy is never 'pure' or 'authentic'. Whether in the kitchen or the staff meeting, or in the boardroom or on the battlefield, it always seems to be in short supply. We are always chasing it around corners, through halls of mirrors, across uncharted landscapes and oceans, up into blue skies. And while improvement, perfectibility – and disappointment and failure – are inscribed within the very ideal of democracy, the role of journalism theory in such circumstances is to remind us of the practical requirements of the ideal – at the global level.

Theories of journalism have done an uneven job of addressing such issues. Work on globalization permeates the academy but it is not often found in journalism curricula, which mention globalization often as an aside or as a problem to be tackled, but rarely as a set of circumstances

that require a rethinking of the premises through which journalism is supposed to work. Curricular developments in journalism – often themselves isolated in scholarly enclaves that separate efforts in international communication and international journalism from journalism history, democratic theory and the like<sup>1</sup> - have not kept pace with the wide-ranging effects that result from the dynamic blending of the local, national, regional, and global domains. Though problems with defining ‘the global’ and its asymmetries still linger – how different, we may ask, is globalization from Americanization or Europeanization - its frequent absence from discussions of journalism urgently needs redress.

It is a truism that global journalism will only grow stronger when journalists themselves positively grasp the importance of local-global dynamics. Theories of journalism can help this development in modest ways by paying more attention to some of the consequent developments of globalization – and the role that journalism has played in making it possible. Some of these developments include : the growing power of hybrid identities and cultures; the multi-linear flows of information; the tensions between fragmentation and homogenization; the proliferation of new forms of unaccountable governmental power and violence; the role of journalism in cultivating a politics of pity; and the often chaotic, contradictory, and unpredictable directionality of the global ebb and flow of media material. While each of these themes is beginning to rub against the territorial state biases of mainstream journalism theory, they have had the short-term effect – strangely – of reinforcing its bland presumption, originally set in place by early efforts like *Four Theories of the Press*, that globalization heralds the triumph of ‘democracy’ through ‘freedom of information’. The presumption that western journalism has

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously*, *op. cit.*

experienced a ‘triumph’ of some sort should be questioned. Not only does it underestimate the vitality in the global environment of media organizations that operate from out-of-center locations, marginalized political viewpoints, and in conjunction with regional habits and peripheral customs. The failure of independent, free-thinking journalism to take root across borders in various *undemocratic* environments, especially in the so-called ‘pariah’ states of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, also needs to be noted. Such developments cast doubt on simple-minded accounts of globalization and the benefits it brings to journalism. These developments should serve to complicate our understanding of the domestic role of journalism, to see that it is caught up in processes that were not predicted by existing theories of journalism, that the present growth spurt of globalization poses new challenges to journalism.

Theories of journalism certainly need to reflect upon the fate of democracy in a globalizing era. The normative question needs to be asked : what’s so good about democracy, especially given that it consistently disappoints because in practice it never lives up to its promises? Why should we hang on to it and its corresponding forms of journalism? And why should we work to democratize institutions that straddle the earth? Part of our problem is that the standard answers of the past no longer seem plausible. The presumptions, for instance, that the Christian God blessed people with ‘liberty of the press’ and the power or ‘natural right’ to govern themselves, or that Nations are naturally democratic, or that freedom of communication and self-government are requirements of a Universal Principle of Happiness or the attainment of Truth in human affairs, all seem and sound unconvincing, except perhaps to unembarrassed diehards with a poor sense of irony. The dogma that

History or the Market or the search for Truth or Happiness will deliver us into the arms of democracy and open communication is no less unconvincing.<sup>1</sup> Even the cherished notion that the Sovereign People are the sacred First Principle of democratic forms of government is questionable, and needs to be jettisoned on normative and empirical grounds. Especially under modern conditions, the Sovereign People principle has repeatedly fraternized with the populist enemies of democracy, those who kick down against other citizens in the name of ‘the people’. Its descriptive power has also been undermined by the invention of many different types of power-dividing and power-monitoring institutions – judicial review, second chambers, quota rules, citizenship rights legislation – that have the effect, among others, of highlighting the *fictional* and *hubris-ridden* character of the principle.<sup>2</sup> The upshot is that democracy nowadays resembles a drunk staggering in search of a lamp post, which is why new *post-foundational* justifications for the superiority of democracy as a way of organizing human affairs are badly needed. To note (in the form of empirical observations<sup>3</sup>) that thanks to the tragedies and the triumphs of the twentieth century democracy has for the first time ever become a ‘universal commitment’ is not enough (even if it were plausible as an observation). The question of why democracy is universally preferable is begged.

The presumption that American-style democracy is a good thing is evident in the well-known and influential Hutchins Report, authored by prominent public figures such as Zechariah Chafee, Harold Lasswell,

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<sup>1</sup> John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 10-50

<sup>2</sup> See John Keane, *Whatever Happened to Democracy?* (London 2002); and Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable* (Paris 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen, ‘Democracy as a Universal Value’, *Journal of Democracy* 10, 3 (1999), pp. 3-17.

Arthur Schlesinger, and Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>1</sup> Its recommendations included constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press; government facilitation of new ventures and open competition in the communications industry; the legal enforcement of the view that agencies of mass communication should operate as common carriers of information and discussion; the encouragement of the press to use every means to increase the competence, independence and effectiveness of its staff; and the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press. Even if they need to be supplemented with new initiatives – like the Pew Global Attitudes Project - these proposals certainly remain sensible. Yet nowhere in the Hutchins report is there a serious discussion of why democracy is a desirable goal – and why journalism should do all it can everywhere to defend, nurture and extend both the spirit and institutions of democracy.

Even though the Hutchins Report's support for democracy is admirable, the need to champion fresh claims appropriate to our times is pressing. *Three* inter-related lines of thinking seem especially worthwhile. The first is that democracy, far from being a First Principle, is in fact the key condition of possibility of freedom from the compulsory adherence to all such Principles, such as the Nation or History or Progress or the Market or the State or the People. Seen in this way, as a set of institutions and as a way of life, a democracy is best considered as a non-violent means of equally apportioning and (with the help of a rich diversity of communications media) publicly monitoring power within and among overlapping communities of people who live according to a wide variety of morals. A second line of justification highlights the ways in which democracy is an early warning device, in that it can help to define and

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission on Freedom of the Press, *A Free and Responsible Press* (Chicago 1947)

publicize risks, especially those generated by complex and tightly-coupled organizations that have global effects. Still another argument for democracy was suggested by E.M. Forster. ‘So Two Cheers for Democracy’, he wrote : ‘one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough : there is no occasion to give three.’<sup>1</sup> There is in fact a third, the cheer that should be given for democratic power-sharing as the best human weapon so far invented against the hubris that comes with concentrations of power.

The struggle against blind arrogance and stupidity caused by power is never ultimately winnable, yet it is among the struggles that we human beings abandon at our own peril. Democracy is a powerful remedy for hubris. It champions not the Rule of the People – that definition of democracy belongs in more ways than one to the Age of Kings - but the rule that no single body should rule<sup>2</sup>. It refuses to accept that decision makers can draw their legitimacy from gods and goddesses, or tradition, or habit, or wealth. Democracy is a way of life and a way of governing in which power is publicly accountable, in which the use of violence and sitting on thrones and making decisions behind the backs of others – and the intrigues and ambitions that usually accompany arbitrary rule - are deeply problematic.

The history of democracy is replete with a weird and wonderful cast of figures who believed in democracy because they saw that it could humble blind arrogance. This history begins in the fifth-century B.C., with characters like the Cynics, who hurled javelins of fun and sarcasm - and

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<sup>1</sup> E.M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York 1951), p. 70

<sup>2</sup> Further discussion of this point is to be found in my *Violence and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York 2004) and ‘Democracy : The Rule of Nobody?’, *B.N. Ganguly Memorial Lecture* (New Delhi 2004).



farted and fornicated in public – for the purpose of democratically humbling arrogant authority. The history of democracy extends through to modern figures more familiar to us : God-fearing Christian and republican opponents of slavery; atheist rebels who built street barricades, raised red flags, and aimed cobblestones at glass panes, in the name of democratic liberty; workers who refused to be wage slaves; the suffragettes who read Ibsen and Pankhurst or Angelina Grimké, or chained themselves to railings, rented Zeppelins to drop leaflets on parliament, and rallied in Trafalgar Square in defence of free speech, garbed in purple and green; the bearded dissidents of Moscow, Warsaw and Prague, hunched over their typewriters and huddled together on sofas in smoke-filled apartments; and Buddhist monks in crimson robes, walking barefoot, keeping ‘the mind mindful’ as they collected rice from the faithful for the cause of civil freedom against brutish dictatorship.

For all of these figures, democracy was a way of life, not a marketable commodity. They did not suffer fools gladly. They refused the temptations of aggrandizement and did not much like big clichés and smelly little orthodoxies. They trusted in simple decency. They did not believe that an unequal society was inevitable. They thought that human beings could and should govern themselves. They believed in the power of the powerless. That is why, in these testing times, their democratic spirit, helped along by global journalism, badly deserves to be nurtured – not only within but also beyond the borders of territorial states.

August 2, 2004