

**THE PRESS AS A CONSULTATIVE PUBLIC FORUM**

by

Michael Karlberg

B.A., University of California, 1990

B.Ed., University of Toronto, 1992

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School

of

Communication

© Michael Karlberg 1995

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

September 1995

All rights reserved. This work may not be  
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy  
or other means, without permission of the author.



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

**The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

ISBN 0-612-16944-8

**Canada**

**PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE**

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

**Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay**

The press as a Consultative Public Forum  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Author:**

(Signature)

Michael Karlberg  
(name)

5 September 1995  
(date)

**APPROVAL**

**NAME:** Michael Karlberg  
**DEGREE:** MA  
**TITLE:** The press as a Consultative Public Forum

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

**CHAIR:** Peter Anderson

Robert Hackett  
Senior Supervisor  
School of Communication, SFU

Pat Howard  
Supervisor  
School of Communication, SFU

Ian Angus  
Examiner  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, SFU

**Date:** 5 September 1995

## ABSTRACT

Cultural institutions embody normative models. The press is no exception. The current operating model of the Canadian press is based on the twin normative principles of freedom of expression and the freedom to pursue profit. By themselves, however, these twin principles do not ensure a public forum within which the ideas, perspectives, interests and concerns of citizens and groups can be exchanged, in a consultative atmosphere, with other citizens, other groups, and policy makers.

Critics of the prevailing model are increasingly pointing out its failure to contribute to the development of an inclusive, functional, and participatory civil society. As Canada enters the twenty-first century, it is time to formulate a new model of the press, based on the contemporary needs and aspirations of its citizens. This thesis is a contribution to this process. It begins by examining the need for reform, through a review of the current state of the press. Next it examines the normative roots of the prevailing operational model of the press, in order to place its emergence, and possible reform, in a historical context. An alternative model, based on the concept of a consultative public forum, is then proposed, and its primary objectives and operating principles are outlined. The thesis concludes by exploring the prospects for such reform, identifying four fronts on which reform will need to be pursued if it is to be effective: the press, the public, the political economy, and the academy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
PREFACE .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
<b>I THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PRESS AND THE NEED FOR REFORM .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Why Care? Cultivation Theory and the Press as a Cultural Institution .....	5
The Commercial Logic of the Press and its Cultural Implications.....	6
News Values.....	9
Event orientation .....	10
Drama / graphicness / sensation .....	11
Personalities .....	13
Simplicity .....	14
Violence, conflict, and negativity .....	16
Source Biases.....	19
Information subsidies.....	19
Primary definition.....	20
Hegemony .....	23
Other News Determinants.....	25
Frames, stereotypes, and prejudgement.....	26
Ethical relativism .....	29
The Need for Reform.....	31
<b>II THE NORMATIVE ROOTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY PRESS .....</b>	<b>32</b>
The Ascendancy of a Seventeenth-Century Normative Model.....	32
British Libertarian Principles: Freedom and Profit.....	33
Amplification in the United States.....	37
The Libertarian Model Imported into Canada.....	38
Press Reform Issues and Efforts in Canada .....	39

Other Normative Challenges to the Libertarian Press.....	44
Soviet Communism.....	44
Social Responsibility Theory.....	46
Variations on the Democratic Theme.....	50
New Journalism Movements.....	55
III THE CONSULTATIVE PUBLIC FORUM.....	61
Why a Consultative Public Forum?.....	62
Objectives.....	64
Community development.....	65
Collective decision-making.....	67
Conflict resolution.....	69
Operating Principles.....	73
Complexity, subtlety, and context.....	75
Diversity of perspective.....	77
Accuracy of representation.....	79
Moderate tone of expression.....	81
Suspended judgement.....	84
Ethical principle.....	87
IV PROSPECTS FOR REFORM.....	93
Reform as a Historical Process.....	93
The Press.....	96
The Public.....	101
The Political Economy.....	105
Adversarial relations.....	107
The commodification of public discourse.....	109
The Academy.....	114
CONCLUSION.....	119
REFERENCES.....	122

## PREFACE

Over the course of the last decade, I have been a reforestation contractor, a student of environmental issues, and an environmental studies teacher at the high school level. Through my education and experience in environmental issues — especially forestry issues — I have gained considerable insight into the difficulties involved in their resolution. Increasingly complex technological, economic, social, and political forces all converge to make these some of the most intractable issues of the day. Yet even as they become more intractable, their resolution becomes more urgent. Every day that we do not resolve these issues we further impoverish our environment and ourselves. Some of this impoverishment will take generations to recover from. Some of it, such as the extinction of species, is irreversible.

Our inability, as a society, to come to grips with these issues has many interwoven causes. Institutional structures are often inadequate. Political and economic interests are often unwilling. Cynicism and disillusionment leave large portions of the population indifferent and apathetic. Racism, sexism, nationalism, inordinate class disparities, and other divisive forces act as barriers to consensus and cooperation. An obsession with science, technology, and economic expansion frames the terms of social progress in a narrow, materialistic manner. And a lack of fundamental communicative skills and forums inhibits community development, collective decision-making, and conflict resolution.

The thesis that follows is concerned most immediately with this last point: the inadequacy of communicative skills and forums in our society. But my intention is that the thesis be understood in the context of the broader needs, and movements, that are occurring on all of these fronts. No one of them is isolated. They are all interdependent.

The contributions that I hope to make with this thesis are threefold. First, I hope to illustrate the inadequacy of one contemporary forum of public communication — the press



— in serving the needs of our society as we wrestle with these intractable issues. Beyond mere criticism, I also hope to offer an alternative model of the press that could prompt dialogue and reflection about reform. Finally, beyond simply offering such a model, I also hope to present a persuasive case that such reform is both possible and worth working for.

This last objective has undoubtedly been the most difficult. This is a deeply pessimistic and cynical age, and academics frequently position themselves in the advance guard of these sentiments. With the entrenchment of these sentiments, however, a paralyzing contradiction seems to have developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people — including many academics — long for change. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that we are incapable of such change.

I would argue, however, that as long as we accept such a proposition it will be both self-fulfilling and self-defeating. Granted, a healthy degree of skepticism and the capacity for critical analysis are valuable assets. They allow us to see the need for change, recognize the obstacles, and navigate a realistic course. They enable and empower us. Wholesale pessimism and cynicism, on the other hand, do the opposite — they disable and disempower us.

As a father of two young daughters, I recently watched as the older one learned how to walk. It was a very difficult skill for her to learn — and a difficult process, at times, to watch. She had some setbacks, took some bad falls, and received a few good bruises. But when she fell, she was not told to give up the effort, nor was she instilled by her parents with self-doubt. She was encouraged with each new step, each new approximation, and she eventually learned.

When we struggle as societies to collectively take new steps, to acquire new social skills and capabilities, why are we so often paralyzed with pessimism and self-doubt about our nature — our capacity to change and develop? Why can we not view our collective development in ways that are analogous to our individual development? Do we forget our past social accomplishments so easily? Do we forget, for instance, that on many continents

throughout history, and up until only a century ago, the enslavement of other human beings was considered a morally acceptable and legally sanctioned practice — and those who defended it argued that its abolition would be contrary to human nature? Do we forget that the dictatorial authority of monarchs was likewise considered a necessary function of the state — and those who defended it argued that humanity was, by nature, incapable of other forms of government? Or do we forget that until recently private disputes were often settled by duels — the pistol being recognized as a legitimate and legal instrument for conflict resolution — and those who upheld dueling argued that to legally abolish the practice would, again, be contrary to human nature?

The thesis that follows assumes that meaningful processes of social development and change are not “contrary to human nature,” but rather *are human nature*. Acquiring new social skills and capabilities is inevitably difficult, and we can expect bruises and setbacks along the way. But that does not make them unworthy of effort or impossible of achievement. Some will undoubtedly view this interpretation of human nature and social development as an outburst of naive idealism. I view it as a conscious, deliberate, and empowering interpretation of our social capacity as a species.

## INTRODUCTION

April 13, 1993. The British Columbia government announces its Clayoquot Sound land-use decision. All of the area's old-growth forests are to be clearcut, with the exception of the Mergin watershed. In response to the announcement, local citizens set up a blockade of MacMillan Bloedel's logging operations near Kennedy Lake. The blockade soon attracts people and support from across Canada. More than 900 peaceful protesters are eventually arrested. Many of them are criminally convicted.

These events, following the 1993 Clayoquot Sound land-use decision, spawned a media frenzy that quickly spread beyond British Columbia to the national and even international news media. The events had all the right ingredients of a *newsworthy* story: emotionally loaded controversy, a David-and-Goliath-like conflict, illegal actions, media-genic visuals, and heated interviews.

The Clayoquot Sound events sold newspapers. And as a valuable *commodity* for the commercial press, they were covered extensively. But what was the public value of that coverage? Did it engage citizens in a meaningful dialogue about the issues at hand? Did it provide an opportunity for those issues to be publicly worked out? Did it assist the efforts of citizens and their elected representatives to clarify the principles upon which future land-use policy could be formulated? Did it contribute to the development of a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society? In short, did it serve in any way as an effective forum for public consultation?

Interest groups on all sides of the Clayoquot issue would probably concur that the press performed poorly according to these criteria. And although these questions have not been specifically researched within the academic community, the general literature in the field of media studies would tend to support that conclusion. The contemporary press, it seems, is not in the business of fulfilling these public functions. In fact, the business it is

in, and the principles that currently guide its operation, seem to almost preclude its ability to serve processes of public consultation.

Most groups seeking to create and engage in such public consultation have learned that in order to even get the attention of the press, they have to adopt an almost guerrilla approach to public communications. They have to learn how the media operate and then employ tactical communications strategies to gain coverage. Corporate and partisan interests have been practicing this type of strategic communication for decades, under the name of public relations, and they have become quite proficient at it. But public interest groups are also gradually learning and adopting these skills. For instance, the blockade at Clayoquot Sound was, among other things, a media strategy meant to force entry into the public sphere.

But are we, as a society, satisfied with a guerrilla approach to public communications? At best, it seems to turn the press into a battle field in which a war of words and images is waged. Rather than engaging the public in meaningful consultation, it merely turns the public sphere into a discursive war-zone. It does not provide an opportunity for citizens to engage in dialogue among themselves, or with their elected policy makers, for the purpose of working out difficult public issues. It does not contribute to the development of a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society.

If the press is to serve as a forum for public consultation, rather than discursive warfare, it needs to be reformed. This thesis is an effort to stimulate inquiry and discussion regarding the nature and possibility of such reform. In developing this thesis I have intentionally waded deep into the waters of normative media theory. In doing so, I share McQuail's (1994) concerns and convictions regarding both the status of normative media theory and the need for communications scholars to engage more fully in it. According to McQuail,

*the status of normative theory is very uncertain and contested in the growing field of 'communication science' . . . There has been a tendency to take the media*

institution and its way of working as an empirical given and proceed from there, leaving normative or ethical matters to other specialists. . . . The result has been a marginalization of the subject of social theory of the media and a widespread reluctance on the part of ‘scientists’ to generalize about the proper role of mass media in society — what they *ought* to be doing. Of course, there is no shortage of social critics and polemicists who are ready to step in, but what they generally do is pass judgement rather than formulate or clarify the standards of judgement. What generally passes for ‘mass communication theory’ seems to exist, therefore, in a wider theoretical and normative vacuum. . . . This state of affairs is unsatisfactory at a time of considerable change and reconstruction of media institutions, when normative questions need to be faced. (p. 236)

My intention in adopting a normative approach in this thesis is not to make absolute normative pronouncements on the subject of media reform. Rather, the ideas developed in this thesis are exploratory and suggestive. They are intended as one contribution to a dialogue that others, like Dennis McQuail, are also beginning to engage in: a dialogue to “formulate and clarify standards” that can guide reform of the mass media.

The focus of this thesis will specifically be on *the press*, and this requires some definition as well as some qualification. The *press*, as the term is used in this thesis, refers essentially to printed, periodical media characterized by a focus on public affairs — by which I mean events and issues of reasonably broad civic concern. Throughout the thesis, I reluctantly use the terms *newspaper* and *news magazine* as approximate substitutes for *the press*, and the term *news* as an approximate substitute for *public affairs content*. This is merely because these are the dominant cultural forms of periodical print media and public affairs content that exist today. It is not, however, an endorsement of these cultural forms as natural, inevitable, or ideal. In fact, the normative model proposed in this thesis requires the reader to exercise some imagination in envisioning a form of discourse that does not fit neatly into any of the existing genres of news, such as “hard” news reports, editorials, opinion columns, and so forth. The broad category of news, however, seems to be the best fit currently available to the form of discourse I am proposing. In addition, while I am

confining the focus of this thesis to print media, I want to also suggest that the consultative objectives and principles discussed in this thesis are not limited to print media in their application. Many of them could, I believe, be creatively applied to electronic broadcast media, to newly emerging forms of electronic text-based media, and, of course, to interpersonal and small group settings, from which they largely derive. In fact, I submit that our entire universe of public discourse would benefit from the creative and purposeful application of these objectives and principles. But in the interests of keeping this thesis manageable, I am limiting my focus to that constellation of discourse known as the press.

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter One examines the need for reform through a review of the literature on the current state of the press. Chapter Two analyzes the normative roots of the prevailing operational model of the press in order to place its emergence, and possible reform, in a historical context. It also considers some normative alternatives that have so far been proposed. Chapter Three presents an alternative model of the press based on the concept of a consultative public forum.<sup>1</sup> Its primary objectives and operating principles are outlined. Chapter Four explores prospects for the realization of these proposed reforms, identifying four fronts on which reform will need to be pursued if it is to be effective: the press, the public, the political economy, and the academy.

---

<sup>1</sup> In choosing to refer to this model as a *consultative forum* I recognize that the word consultation carries negative connotations to some people. Specifically, many government-sponsored public consultations in recent decades have proven to be little more than social marketing exercises designed to bestow legitimacy on government decisions that have already been made, or in which narrow constraints have already been placed on the outcome. It has been suggested that the concept of *democratic communications* might therefore be more suitable, as used by Wasko and Mosco (1992), Keane (1991), and others. In my experience, however, the concept of *democratic communication* is an extremely vague and difficult concept to pin down, and there is much disagreement on a mutually satisfactory meaning even of the word *democracy*. In addition, the word democracy has also collected negative or superficial connotations for many people, through its long historical association with the particular forms of partisan-liberal politics practiced in Canada, the United States, and many Western countries. For these reasons I prefer to use the term consultation, which has a much more precise meaning. I therefore ask those readers who are made uneasy by the term to suspend their judgement of it until it is defined by the presentation of the consultative model in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PRESS AND THE NEED FOR REFORM

#### Why Care? Cultivation Theory and the Press as a Cultural Institution

Most media scholars and policy makers agree that the mass media collectively constitute “a pervasive political and cultural force” (Hackett, 1991, p. 12). For instance, issues of imported cultural content would not consume the attention of Canadian media scholars and policy makers if this was not a widely shared conclusion.

Early efforts to explain media influence assumed a simple, causal relationship between mass media content and audience response. The *hypodermic needle* theory of the media, for example, assumed that the mass media simply injected values, attitudes, and ideas into a susceptible public. Even though these simplistic causal theories have been rejected in recent decades, the search for more subtle models of media influence continues.

One of these more subtle models is *cultivation theory*. Cultivation theory conceptualizes the media as merely one set of cultural institutions in a complex cultural ecology that influences public discourse, values, and behaviour. It has been used to assess media influence on violence (Gerbner, & Gross, 1976), sex role attitudes (Morgan, 1982), attitudes toward aging (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980), racial and sexual stereotypes (Gross, 1984), intellectual skills (Morgan, & Gross, 1980), socialization and peer-group affiliation (Rothschild, & Morgan, 1987), environmental attitudes (Shanahan, 1993), and other social variables.

According to Shanahan, the term cultivation “is used to indicate that the process is conceived as a cumulative one; there is really no question of immediate effects or impact” (1993, pp. 186-187). As Gerbner (1990) explains:

Cultivation is what a culture does. That is not simple causation, though culture is the basic medium in which humans live and learn. . . . Strictly speaking,

cultivation means the specific independent (though not isolated) contribution that a particularly consistent and compelling symbolic stream makes to the complex process of socialization and enculturation. (p. 249)

According to the logic of cultivation theory, the cumulative influence of the mass media will affect not only public attitudes and behaviour but also the public's relationship to, and expectations of, the media. In other words, through subtle and complex processes of cultivation, the media normalize themselves. To varying degrees we relate to the media in a manner, and according to expectations, that the media themselves have cultivated over time. Such a conceptual framework does not necessarily imply deliberate manipulation or conspiracy. Nor does it assume that these cultivated attitudes are absolute, universal, or non-negotiable. Rather, it recognizes that we are cultural beings and that we are influenced to varying degrees by our cultural institutions, even as we are capable of influencing them.

The following review of the descriptive literature on the mass media is suggestive of the kind of influence that the press exerts on our culture — the attitudes, values, and behaviour that it cultivates — and hence the need for reform.

### **The Commercial Logic of the Press and its Cultural Implications**

A fundamental characteristic of the contemporary commercial press is the logic of readership-maximization that drives it. According to this logic, the primary product of the press is not content but readership. And the primary service of the press is delivering its product, the attention of readers, to its primary clientele: advertisers (Smythe, 1981). Moreover, it is not just any readership that is sought: Efforts are made to maximize readership within populations that have the specific purchasing patterns that advertisers are interested in.

Many newswriters, of course, make a case for the relative autonomy of the press in its public service functions. The record of the press, however, tends to undermine these



arguments. As it exists today, the Canadian commercial press is first and foremost a profit-driven operation, and public service functions are subservient to the bottom line.

The application of this commercial logic has had a significant influence on public affairs content. One consequence has been the orientation of the press toward a readership that advertisers will find most attractive: consumers — especially affluent consumers. Public affairs content therefore is constructed and directed largely toward a consuming public, rather than a civically active public. According to Hackett (1991):

News in the commercial mass media tends to be directed toward an assumed mass audience of consumers and political spectators — rather than (for example) workers and active participants in political life. This narrative orientation, this mode of address, this positioning of audiences is most evident in the fusion of “news” and advertising in the fashion, living, home, travel, sports, and leisure sections of Canadian dailies. Even “hard news” reportage subtly complements the ads in some ways: In its selection and construction of stories, news discourse appears to take the standpoint of the assumed “average” consumer. (pp. 68-69)

Another consequence of this commercial logic is the continual pressure on the press to gain and hold the attention of readers (a pressure that is felt even more urgently in television news). After all, the reader’s *attention* is what advertisers pay for. Ironically, the first definition provided for the word *entertain* in the American Heritage Dictionary (1969) is “to hold the attention of.” The line between news-as-information and news-as-entertainment is therefore a somewhat blurry line — and becoming increasingly blurry with the emergence of a growing subset of news appropriately labeled *info-tainment*. Granted, the so-called *quality* press, such as Canada’s *Globe and Mail*, may be governed by a fairly strong information-providing function. But most popular broad sheet and tabloid papers clearly have strong commercial incentives to entertain. As Downs (1972) observes:

News is “consumed” by much of the American public (and by publics everywhere) largely as a form of entertainment. As such, it competes with other types of entertainment for a share of each person’s time. Every day, there is a

fierce struggle for space in the highly limited universe of newsprint and television viewing time. Each issue vies not only with all other social problems and public events, but also with a multitude of "non-news" items. (p. 42)

Yet another consequence of this commercial logic is the need for the press to avoid alienating both its advertising clients and its readership through critical challenges to existing political<sup>2</sup> and commercial interests on the one hand, and to popular perceptions and values on the other. As Dunwoody and Griffin (1993) point out:

News media are an integral part of communities and tend to reflect the concerns of the power structure of their particular setting, usually serving as reinforcers of established authority, powerful interests and mainstream values. (pp. 27)

In order to retain both its clients and readership, the press therefore frequently adopts what is assumed to be a non-threatening posture of social neutrality. This rationale is the same as that which Hackett (1991) identifies operating in the network news:

This trend accentuates the avoidance of challenges to the preconceptions thought to be current among the majority of the audience. The audience maximization imperative encourages network news to reflect what news producers take to be the nation's dominant cultural and political "common sense." (p. 68)

It should be pointed out, however, that the interests, values, and "common sense" of the audience (which is itself made up of diverse individuals and groups) frequently contradict the interests and values of advertising clients. Partly for that reason the press often does critically examine specific cases of political or commercial corruption, injustice, and so forth. But these critical examinations generally focus on the misdeeds of specific individuals or corporations, as a few bad apples in an otherwise good barrel. And the press can easily survive without the patronage of those few bad apples. What the press rarely

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out that in addition to commercial advertisers, governments and political parties are also major sources of advertising revenue for the press, and the commercial viability of many newspapers depends in part upon a range of direct and indirect government supports, including advertising revenue (Dunnett, 1988).

does, however, is critically examine the implications of an entire industry, an entire sector of the economy, or even an entire political system, the alienation of which could have significant financial repercussions on the press itself. It may be acceptable to question a few bad apples, but the commercial logic of the press means that it is rarely acceptable to question the nature of the barrel itself. This logic (combined with other biases and pressures discussed later in this chapter) therefore undermines the potential value of the commercial press as a public forum within which critical analysis and reflection can occur regarding the fundamental economic and political structures and relationships in society, as well as popularly held perceptions and values.

The sum of these consequences suggests that the commercial logic of the press, at least as it is currently manifest, limits its contribution to the development of a participatory and functional civil society. By commonly assuming a passive readership of consumers and political spectators, delivering public affairs content as entertainment, and failing to provide a forum for the critical discussion of political and economic structures and relationships, as well as popular values and preconceptions, the commercial press seems to currently tend more toward the cultivation of civic stasis than civic change and development. Little thought is given to the commercial logic of the press, however, because of the prevailing assumption, inherited from classical economics, that a free, market-driven press will automatically function in the collective interests of society. This is an assumption that we will return to in Chapter Two.

### **News Values**

From the commercial/entertainment logic discussed above, as well as the journalistic traditions and history that are interwoven with it, are derived a set of common *news values* that influence the selection and construction of public affairs content. These news values,

or *standards of news-worthiness*, have been the subject of considerable media research. While lists of these values vary depending on the conceptual categories employed by different researchers, the following are widely agreed upon.

***Event-orientation.*** Dominant among news values, and broadly supported in the literature on news construction, is the emphasis on discrete events instead of issues, trends, or processes. According to Lorimer and McNulty (1991):

What the news brings us is events rather than issues. As any public interest group knows. . . any amount of informed analysis about a particular issue will never bring it onto the front pages. But an event, whether putting up a tent on Parliament Hill or barricading major traffic routes, will provide saturation coverage. (p. 118)

The event-orientation of the press is based in large part on the production schedule and organizational constraints of news professionals. Under the pressures and routines of production “the time span taken by an event” is critical in determining its coverage (Hartley, 1982, p. 76). Hartley points out, for instance, that

murders take very little time and their meaning is quickly arrived at. Hence their frequency fits that of daily newspapers and programmes. On the other hand, economic, social or cultural trends take very much longer to unfold and to be made meaningful: they are outside the frequency of daily papers. (p. 76)

The event-orientation of the press is also based on a perception that in order to hold the readership’s attention *news* must be continually *new*; it must be immediate and current. Hence news has come to be thought of in terms such as *fresh* or *stale*. As Osler (1993) explains:

News must be about something that is happening now. An event that occurred twelve months ago is almost out of the time frame demanded by the competitive nature of electronic journalism, unless it can be updated and given fresh life by some amazing new development. One of the results of this crushing concern with “now” is that our yesterdays, our sense of history, and our appreciation of

cause and effect relationships over extended periods of time tend to be lost in the rhythms of modern journalism. (p. 15)

The constant pressure for new stories is most problematic in the coverage of ongoing social and environmental issues. As Stocking and Leonard (1990) report in their discussion of environmental coverage in the news:

Particularly problematic for those who would responsibly report on environmental degradation and depletion is the media's insatiable appetite for new angles. This hunger contributes to the well-known issue-of-the-month syndrome. (Last month it's oil spills, this month it's oil prices.) It allows persistent, and growing, environmental problems to slide out of sight if there is nothing "new" to report. (p. 40)

Or, as Meadows (1991) describes the problem, the press's "attention span is short; they create their own fads and tire of them" (p. 75).

*Drama / graphicness / sensation.* A widely identified cluster of related news values is the emphasis on the dramatic, the graphic, and the sensational. As news historian Mitchell Stephens (1988) argues:

Sensationalism appears to be a technique or style that is rooted somehow in the nature of the news. News obviously can do much more than merely sensationalize, but most news is, in an important sense, sensational: it is intended, in part, to arouse, to excite, often — whether the subject is a political scandal or a double murder — to shock. (p. 2-3)

Such sensationalism, Stephens further suggests, is not merely a recent phenomenon, but is as old as news itself:

Anyone who clings to the notion that the sensationalism practiced by Rupert Murdoch or even the most shameless present-day journalists is unprecedented could be set straight by spending a few minutes with any number of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century newsbooks. (p. 112)

The thrust of Stephens' historical argument is that sensationalism can be traced back far earlier than printed news to the oral news forms that preceded it. Be that as it may, sensationalism arguably received a newfound impetus with the commercialization of printed news and with its later competition with television news as an entertainment commodity. The result has undoubtedly been an amplification of sensational and entertaining values, including graphicness and drama, at the expense of substantive public discourse. As Osler (1993) states:

Closely related to journalism's passion for human interest and other entertainment values, is the craft's insistence on graphic qualities in the news. Basically, news people tend to shun abstract information apparently on the grounds that if it can't be seen, touched, or kicked, it probably isn't newsworthy. . . .

Print shares the problem, with every press reporter preferring to write stories that require picturesque adjectives, busy verbs, and nouns that label real things and visceral actions. And if a great news photo is there to accompany the copy, so much the better. The presence of television as print's overwhelming news competitor in the modern media environment, has intensified the search for the graphic in print. (p. 13)

This tendency exerts significant pressure in the selection and construction of public affairs content. As Desbarats (1990) explains, "a dramatized version of the event must be able to be presented" in order to make it newsworthy (p. 110). Thus:

A rare hazard is more newsworthy than a common one, other things being equal; a new hazard is more newsworthy than an old one; and a dramatic hazard — one that kills many people at once suddenly or mysteriously — is more newsworthy than a long-familiar illness. (Singer, & Endreny, 1987, p. 13)

Emphasis on the dramatic and graphic has obvious consequences for the content of public discourse. It leaves little room for the consideration of broad social problems and concerns requiring a degree of abstraction. But beyond its influence on content, it also places profound pressure on sources seeking representation in the press, often pressuring

them to articulate their concerns through dramatic and graphic actions if they want coverage (Gitlin, 1980). This is especially the case for sources who do not otherwise fit into the normal hierarchy of representation in the news (as discussed later in this chapter). Hackett (1991) describes this pressure in his work on news and the peace movement in Canada:

The media's appetite for drama and novelty present a Hobson's choice for the peace movement: the alternatives of disappearing from the front pages, or of constantly escalating its tactics and rhetoric to stay above the media's rising boredom level. (p. 79)

"The upshot" of these news values, according to Osler (1993), "is that we learn more from our news media about the drama than about the substance" of public affairs (p. 11). Granted, the press (especially the *quality press*) is much more able to provide substance to public affairs reporting than television is. But the press still demonstrates these tendencies.

**Personalities.** Another widely identified news value is the emphasis on the words and actions of individuals or *personalities*. Stephens (1988), referring to personality-based news as "published gossip," offers the following criticism:

Gossip on the street or over coffee has earned its negative reputation not only because it is intrusive but because it is so often exchanged with a touch of cattiness. We make comments about individuals behind their backs that we would never make to their faces, and in these comments we reveal one of our less appealing qualities. . . . Published gossip too speaks to that unattractive side of our natures. (p. 106)

Aside from the displacement of substantive discourse by "published gossip," and the unattractive picture of ourselves that this practice reflects, the emphasis on personalities has other disconcerting consequences. Prominent among these is the tendency to exalt the social status and perspectives of certain types of people — most notably "elite people in positions of power, or celebrities" (Hackett, 1991, p. 76) — over others. As Meadows

(1991) notes, the media “are attracted to personality and authority. . . they are uninterested in people they’ve never heard of” (p. 75).

The focus on elite personalities, however, comes not only at the expense of unknown personalities. It also tends to exclude the shared perspectives, concerns and conditions of organizations, groups, and communities. As Gans (1979) states, it causes the press to “focus on people rather than on groups” as the primary subject of public discourse (p. 50). This focus has many implications that have barely been explored, including the profound constraints it places on the communications efforts of organizations and groups that do not wish to exalt individuals to the status of celebrity-spokespersons (Hackett, 1991, p. 22).

The focus on individuals and personalities also comes at the expense of substantial focus on more abstract historical structures and forces. As Hartley (1982) explains: “Events are seen as the actions of people as individuals. Individual people are easier to identify — and to identify with — than structures, forces or institutions” (p. 78). The overall consequence is again to place profound limitations on the substance of public discourse.

*Simplicity.* Another widely identified news value is simplicity. The constraints that commercial news workers operate under, combined with their assumptions regarding the needs and habits of readers, leaves little space for the presentation of complexity, subtlety, and context. The result is that it becomes extremely difficult to cover social, environmental, and other issues that are, by nature, complex, subtle, and contextual. In selecting stories, news workers are therefore inclined toward a story that is “relatively unambiguous in its meaning” (Desbarats, 1990, p. 110).

According to Hartley (1982), the “unambiguity” or “clarity” of an event is a key factor in determining its newsworthiness:



Events don't have to be simple in themselves, necessarily (although that helps), but the range of meanings must be limited. In this way news-discourse differs radically from literary discourse. In news, the intrinsic *polysemic* (ambiguous — capable of generating many meanings) nature of both events and accounts of them is reduced as much as possible; in literature it is celebrated and exploited. (p. 77)

When complex, subtle, and contextual issues do force themselves into the press due to other overwhelming news values, newswriters often cope by simplifying and decontextualizing them. Of course, these are not deliberate or malicious attempts to rob the issues of meaning. Rather, they are attempts to conform to the constraints within which commercial news workers operate. Most journalists, for instance, are not specialists with background in the subjects they are reporting on (and the current trend is toward increasing reliance on generalist reporters). Nor do journalists have unlimited resources at their disposal to investigate and pursue stories. In addition, commercial journalists operate under extremely tight deadlines in the constant scramble for new stories. The understandable result, as Meadows (1991) notes, is that journalists "have little tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity or complexity," and therefore must simplify issues in order to present them (p. 75).

Another pressure toward simplification is the trend toward smaller stories and shorter column lengths in the press, due in part to competition with the rapid fire images and stories of television news. Thus news is increasingly offered to consumers not as a staple, but as a snack. This trend is especially problematic in the coverage of complex social and environmental affairs. As Stocking and Leonard (1990) point out:

The recent trend toward bite-sized bits of news affects all reporters, of course, but it packs a particular wallap with environmental journalists. The environment story is one of the most complicated and pressing stories of our time. It involves abstract and probabilistic science, labyrinthine laws, grandstanding politicians, speculative economics, and the complex interplay of individuals and societies. . . . Perhaps more than most stories, it needs careful, longer-than-bite-sized reporting and analysis, now. (p. 42)

In fairness, a counter-trend can be discerned in which some newspapers, and especially news magazines, are trying to consciously fill a niche that television cannot easily fill: the provision of in-depth background and analysis. But the overall trend at the moment, as Stocking and Leonard point out, is toward shorter column lengths.

*Violence, conflict, and negativity.* Another widely identified cluster of news values can be seen in the emphasis placed on violence, conflict, and negativity as entertainment values. For instance, the extensive 1977 Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry found that media content “contains a higher proportion of violence than is found in the normal daily lives of individuals,” and that

it seems clear that in the eyes of many media people a major function or purpose of the media is for entertainment. . . . Media people also seem to assume that violence is entertainment. (p. 145)

Osler (1993) concurs:

It is an unfortunate reality that of all the information scenarios one might imagine as lending themselves to the processes that shape news, none lends itself so readily as one in which social or natural violence provides the strong and central theme. (p. 18)

He further suggests that:

Violence takes many forms, and it is useful to keep in mind that some of these can be less obvious than others. As has already been suggested, controversy and confrontation are two of these more subtle forms. They often stand in as surrogates for violence. (p. 19)

Controversy and confrontation, it should be qualified, are very real social phenomena (as is violence), and not to be simply swept under the carpet or ignored by the mass media. Many conflicts certainly do need to be publicly recognized and addressed. But in exploiting them for their entertainment value the press often distorts or obscures the

essential substance of conflicts. Rather than contributing to their resolution it may well be further inflaming them in the process. It is thus the drama of conflict, not the substance of conflict, that generally makes the news, along with a range of other negative and often threatening phenomena. As Hackett (1991) observes:

Drama and conflict are significant news values, as is negativity; death, injury, destruction, social, or environmental harm, or threat of these, are more likely to be covered than good news. (p. 76)

The consequences of these news values are many. On the level of social influence, there is growing consensus around the conclusion that “the simple over-representation of human and natural violence in our daily news may, with time, incline us to believe that the world may be a more violent place than, in fact, it actually is” (Osler, 1993, p. 19).

Another consequence is felt by sources seeking representation in the press. As Hackett (1991) points out:

Many peace groups philosophically renounce violence and the politics of enmity, attempt to build bridges to those who do not share their convictions, and seek consensual forms of internal decision-making. These facets of the peace movement’s life obviously do not accord well with the news value of conflict, in two senses. First, nonconfrontational events are relatively unlikely to be reported in the first place. Second, when the language of newstalk emphasizes elements of conflict, it denies to peace groups the chance publicly to define their own activities in their own terms. (p. 79)

Another consequence of these news values — one that has received remarkably little attention — is the manner in which they influence the tone of public discourse, and in turn the tone the public comes to expect from public discourse. With violence, dramatic conflict, and negativity as reigning standards of newsworthiness, news stories are frequently constructed around extreme and offensive statements. On the one hand, this can be seen in the manner that reporters quote public figures, often taking statements out of context to accentuate their inflammatory nature, or focusing on a few heated moments in a much larger dialogue. On the other hand, it can be seen in the almost automatic coverage of

the ultimatums and offensive posturing that characterize many labour and other public disputes; or the partisanship, derision, insult, and character assassination that characterizes much modern political debate. Outside of *hard news*, it also can be seen in the almost constant stream of ridicule, contempt, and derision that frequently characterize editorials, opinion columns, letters to the editor, and even political cartoons.

It should be emphasized that all of the commercial news values presented above are not used by journalists merely in selecting stories for print. Journalists do not merely select stories. They actively construct them (Hartley, 1982, pp. 75-86). From the universe of relevant background information, issues, facts, opinions, sources, statements, etc., journalists select and emphasize some over others, and embed them within specific narrative styles, in order to create "news."

Furthermore, under the constant pressure to drum up news that conforms to the commercial values outlined above, journalists sometimes go to great lengths to massage stories to fit. Commercial imperatives, in other words, sometimes pressure journalists "to force the evidence to conform to their story" (Meadows, 1991, p. 75). As Osler (1993) describes:

This is especially true in the often convoluted seeking out of the obscure sub-themes of controversy or confrontation, that are then used quite literally to force and twist the subject into a journalistically entertaining mold. (p. 11)

Very little that happens in the world actually meets the criteria of newsworthiness. Thus, there is a continuing creative struggle in every newsroom to force information into a mold that rarely fits. . . . this practice is so well entrenched that a term for it exists in the jargon of the craft — "hardening" the news values. (p. 16)

The hardening of news values as a means of forcing inappropriate information into the narrowly defined news mold of journalistic tradition is a very common practice. (p. 17)

It should also be noted that the net result of the commercial news values discussed above seems to be the construction of a world in which human nature is largely characterized by adversarial relationships, aggression, competition, self-interest, and other divisive characteristics — characteristics that are presented at the expense of emphasis on mutuality, reciprocity, service, cooperation, and other unifying social forces. This is a theme we will return to in Chapters Three and Four.

### **Source Biases**

Another dominant characteristic of the contemporary press is the manner in which it systematically privileges the representation of some segments of the population over others. Several theories that have been developed to explain the source-biases of the press are presented below.

*Information subsidies.* Oscar Gandy (1992) has developed an economic critique of source-bias “based on the recognition that access to information represents genuine costs to decision makers” (p. 141). “Information subsidies,” according to Gandy, are used “by policy actors to increase the consumption of persuasive messages by reducing their cost, without reducing their perceived value or utility for decision-making” (p. 142).

Gandy draws on the work of Leon Sigal (1973), who identifies three channels through which journalists gather information: routine, informal, and enterprise. Routine channels include public relations handouts, semi-official documents, and other readily available material representing the lowest-cost channel of information gathering. At the other end of the spectrum, enterprise channels comprise high-cost investigative research and reporter-initiated interviews.

Gandy (1980) proposes an information subsidy model in which “the information subsidies of journalists and other gate-keepers operate on the basis of simple economic

rules. Journalists need news, however defined, and routine sources are the easiest way to gain that information” (p. 106). The result, Gandy asserts, is that

the news media, traditionally seen as an independent and highly credible source for information about the environment, is in fact, dominated by purposive information supplied by [sources] interested in influencing private and public decision-making. (p. 106)

Nor do journalists only receive information subsidies directly. Information subsidies are provided to policy makers, interest groups, the academic community, and even the entertainment industry — after which this subsidized information continues to move across media and other boundaries and thus is received by journalists indirectly (Gandy, 1982, 1992; Turow, 1989).

The problem with information subsidies, Gandy (1980) argues, is that “success in providing information subsidies to one’s chosen targets is closely tied to the resources available to the subsidy giver” (p. 106). Therefore:

Although all policy actors may engage in public relations, not all actors have the resources with which to ensure the success of their efforts. Public policy may be considered a game where the outcome is far from certain . . . but one is less at risk in wagering on the outcome when the combatants differ greatly in their resource endowments. Although public relations resources may occasionally be brought to bear in a debate on behalf of the interests of the citizen/consumer . . . corporate and government bureaucracies are the primary clients and beneficiaries. (Gandy, 1992, p. 135)

Information subsidies, in other words, privilege the representation of resource-rich and press-savvy interests within society, allowing these interests to dominate public discourse and “structure realities for millions of people” (Turow, 1989, p. 212).

**Primary definition.** Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) have developed a structural critique of source-bias based on the theory that sources with different positions in the social hierarchy have different access to the media. According to this

theory, the structurally-privileged sources have greater access and influence on the media and therefore act as *primary definers* of public issues. These include government officials, industry and organizational representatives, and various experts that the media consider authoritative, accredited, and objective sources. According to Hall et al.:

Media statements are, wherever possible, grounded in 'objective' and authoritative statements made from 'accredited' sources. This means constantly turning to accredited social representatives of major social institutions. . . . Ironically, the very rules which aim to preserve the impartiality of the media, and which grew out of desires for greater professional neutrality, also serve powerfully to orientate the media in the 'definitions of social reality' which their 'accredited sources' — the institutional spokesmen — provide. . . .

The result of this structured preference given in the media to the opinions of the powerful is that these 'spokesmen' become what we call the *primary definers* of topics . . . [This] permits the institutional definers to establish the initial definition or *primary interpretation* of the topic in question. This interpretation then 'commands the field' in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage of debate takes place. Arguments *against* a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into *its* definition of 'what is at issue' — they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting point. (p. 58)

Hall et al. conclude that the media's

structured relationship to power has the effect of making them play a crucial secondary role in *reproducing* the definitions of those who have privileged access, as of right, to the media as 'accredited sources'. From this point of view, in the moment of news production, the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers. (p. 59)

Revisiting the concept of primary definition in 1986, Hall summarizes the inequitable consequences of structural privilege:

Some things, people, events, relationships always get represented: always centre-stage, always in a position to define, to set the agenda, to establish the terms of the conversation. Some others sometimes get represented — but

always at the margin, always responding to a question whose terms and conditions have been defined elsewhere: never 'centred'. Still others are always 'represented' only by their eloquent absence, their silences: or refracted through the glance or the gaze of others. (p. 9)

Other media scholars have been careful to qualify the impression Hall et al. give of primary definition as absolute and non-negotiable. Schlesinger (1990), for example, argues that exceptions to structural privilege do exist, that the boundaries of privilege can shift over time, that the flow of definition is not always uni-directional from source to media, that negotiation may occur prior to definition, and that counter-definitions can dislodge primary definitions. Schlesinger therefore moves away from a theory of structural determinism and toward a theory of structural advantage. "It is necessary," he writes, "that sources be conceived as occupying fields in which *competition for access* to the media takes place, but in which material and symbolic advantages are unequally distributed" (p. 77); "putting it differently, *primary definition becomes an achievement rather than a wholly structurally predetermined outcome*" (p. 79, original emphasis).

Another qualification of the primary definer thesis comes from Ericson, Baranek, and Chan's (1989) extensive study of Canadian news sources. In their study, Ericson et al. confirm the existence of structural privilege and a "hierarchy of credibility" that to a large extent determines source access to the media (p. 396). But they do not find that this structural privilege necessarily translates into primary definition. Instead, they assert that news definitions emerge through a complex process of negotiation between sources and journalists, that this process is not uniform across news and source organizations but is instead highly context dependent, and that it is sometimes the journalist, and not the source, that provides the primary definition (p. 378). Ericson et al. derive this assertion from findings that a hierarchy exists not only among sources, but that "a hierarchy of relatively powerful and influential journalists" also exists, with powerful resources at their disposal to shape news definitions (p. 378). "News organizations," Ericson et al. conclude,



thereby join with key source organizations in representing the authoritative apparatus of society. News becomes a vehicle for communication among those towards the top end of the knowledge structure of society, while those at the bottom end are left to spectate.” (p. 5)

These arguments therefore qualify absolute and deterministic notions of primary definition, and suggest a more fluid process in which complex processes of negotiation occur that are highly context dependent. At the same time, however, they support the general concept of structurally privileged access, from which privileged opportunities to negotiate news definitions derive. As Schlesinger concludes,

there is still undoubtedly a strong case for arguing that the way in which journalistic practice is organized *generally* promotes the interests of authoritative sources, especially those within the apparatus of government and state. That is a paramount finding of much of the contemporary sociology of journalism. (p. 69)

***Hegemony.*** Another theory of source-bias can be traced to the theory of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s. Although a life-long Marxist, Gramsci was unsatisfied with the notion of historical materialism and its emphasis on economic forces as the determinant of social structure. Instead, Gramsci was interested in the historical force that cultural beliefs, ideas, and values exert in perpetuating a consciousness and social structure that harbours injustice and inequity (Gramsci, 1971).

According to Gramsci, powerful interests in society maintain dominance not by economic coercion or physical force alone, but by the cultivation of a “hegemonic” system of beliefs and values that reinforces their dominant position. This system of beliefs and values then “becomes enmeshed with the ‘common sense’ through which people make their lives and their world intelligible” (Hackett, 1991, p. 57).

A wide range of social institutions are engaged in this cultivation, often unwittingly through the uncritical acceptance, imitation, and transmission of these beliefs and values. These are primarily institutions with a “pedagogic relationship” with society (Gramsci,

1971, p. 350). This may include state institutions, the clergy, the educational system, the family, and the mass media. According to Hartley (1994):

These institutions are prolific producers of sense, knowledge and meanings — they are cultural agencies whose importance lies just as much in their role as organizers and producers of individual and social consciousness as in their more obvious ‘stated’ functions. Although they are relatively autonomous from one another, peopled by different personnel with different professional skills and ideologies, nevertheless these cultural agencies collectively form the site on which hegemony can be established and exercised. (p. 134)

A wide range of contemporary scholars continue to invoke the concept of hegemony. This is especially apparent in the field of communications, where the mass media conform so well to the hegemonic model (see, for example, Cassidy, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Hartley, 1982). As Hackett (1991) explains:

The media constitute a hegemonic apparatus *par excellence*, given their distinctive characteristics: Their continuous availability and lifelong flow, their constant provision of definitional categories, their ideological similarity concealed beneath a diversity of forms, their appropriation of leisure time and pseudoresolution of people’s needs in fantasy and entertainment, and their intermeshing with other hegemonic institutions. (p. 59)

As a hegemonic institution, the media tend to privilege those sources whose perspectives are in accord with hegemonic interpretations of reality. At the same time, the media tend to filter out or misrepresent the *counter-hegemonic* perspectives of those who are not. Again, this is not necessarily a conscious or deliberate process on the part of newswriters. Rather, it reflects the frequent alignment of their professional judgement and work routines with the hegemonic beliefs and values of the day. Hegemony thus exerts its influence by simply making alternative perspectives appear “unrealistic, or unreasonable, or even renders them unthinkable within the established maps of reality” (Hackett, 1991, p. 57).

One result of this process is that the diversity of perspectives represented in the media are diminished. Hegemony, of course, is never absolute and uncontested. Opportunities for the representation of alternative and critical perspectives — or counter-hegemonies — do exist. But they must compete from the periphery of public discourse against privileged sources reinforcing dominant interpretations of reality.

The three theories of source-bias presented above need not be understood as mutually exclusive explanations. In many respects they may be understood as complementary and mutually compatible. Regardless of the theoretical explanations of systemic source-bias, however, the existence of source bias is one of the most widely agreed upon conclusions in media research. It is supported by researchers in countries around the world (Anderson, 1993; Gandy, 1980; Gans, 1979; Greenberg, Sachsman, Sandman, & Salome, 1989; Hansen, 1991; Nohrstedt, 1991; Sparks, 1986) including Canada (Chapin, & Stirling, 1977; Einsiedel, & Coughlan, 1993; Ericson et al., 1989; Hackett, 1991). The Canadian media, including the press, thus systematically privilege some sources over others and thereby diminish the breadth of perspective available as a resource to the public and its policy makers.

“The news-media institution,” in the words of Ericson et al. (1987), “is effectively closed to most citizens” (p. 364). This is, again, a theme that we will return to in Chapter Three.

### **Other News Determinants**

Aside from the commercial logic, news values, and source biases discussed above, two other categories of news determinants are relevant to this discussion. These are explored below.

*Frames, stereotypes, and prejudgement.* We all selectively interpret the world around us by limiting the amount of information we receive in any given situation and by making sense out of that information according to previous experiences and culturally learned patterns of understanding. If we did not do this we would drown in the ocean of information that our senses continually receive. Therefore, from this ocean of available information we consciously and unconsciously select that which we require and interpret it according to mental models, or maps, that allow us to function and navigate in the world.

Newswriters are no exception to this rule. They employ the same selective and interpretive coping skills that all of us do in our daily lives and work — the same skills that were employed in constructing this thesis for that matter. But the selective interpretations of the world by newswriters (or the interpretations of privileged sources that they re-transmit) carry one distinction: They are disseminated to entire populations. Of course, readers do not merely accept these selective interpretations uncritically. They renegotiate the meaning of the news they receive through their own processes of selection and interpretation. But the universe of information available to them has already been limited by the press. In addition, the constant repetition of similar interpretive frameworks by the press can have the subtle influence of cultivating, reinforcing, and naturalizing widely shared interpretive patterns.

Much of the scholarly study of interpretive patterns in the press has employed the theoretical concept of *news frames*. The term *frame* was originally used by Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974) as a psychological concept describing how individuals include, exclude, and organize experience. The concept was imported into media analysis by Tuchman (1978) in her analysis of news construction, and soon after it was expanded by Gitlin (1980) in his analysis of the media's coverage of the New Left student movement in the 1960s. Today the concept of news frames is used widely in the literature on media analysis, although slight variations of definition are employed depending on the researcher.

Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) offer a useful summary definition of a news frame as “a central organizing idea for news that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (p. 5).

While news frames may be an inevitable part of news reporting, one of the problems with their current manifestation is that they tend to be highly uniform throughout the news industry. As Dunwoody and Griffin (1993) note:

Considerable evidence suggests that frames utilized by journalists for story construction are not idiosyncratic. . . . Rather, journalists across a wide range of media seem to employ similar mental maps and, thus, produce stories that reconstitute the world in similar ways. (p. 24)

This uniformity is variously attributed to organizational routines and constraints (including simply the lack of time and resources), or to commercial/entertainment imperatives, or to the lack of critical analysis on the part of newswriters. Regardless of the cause, however, the result is the formulaic or stereotypical presentation of events, issues, and people. For instance, in Daley and O’Neill’s (1991) analysis of press coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, they conclude that the “disaster narrative” — a widely replicated news frame — was employed in the press coverage of the event, that this coverage therefore “resembled weather forecasts” in its focus on the daily spread of the oil slick, and that it naturalized the “disaster” by juxtaposing it with an earthquake that had hit the community 25 years earlier (p. 47). The result, according to Daley and O’Neill, was that the widely replicated disaster narrative

naturalized the spill, effectively withdrawing from discursive consideration both the marine transport system and the prospective pursuit of alternative energy sources. The disaster narrative overtly moved discourse away from the political arena and into the politically inaccessible realm of technological inevitability. (p. 53)

In addition to the “formula-governed and patterned” framing of large scale events, Osler (1993) notes the same process at work with the stereotyped coverage of individual people:

Journalism tends to label people stereotypically. In their haste to cover events and report them in their media as quickly as possible, reporters tend to see their news sources not as individual human beings with unique characteristics who, for instance, happen at the moment to be giving speeches on public platforms. Instead, they are “labour leaders” or “student radicals,” “feminists,” or “politicians.” Such labels carry stereotypical attributes and when these prevail, as often they do in journalism’s haste, information becomes formula-governed and patterned. (p. 20)

Media analysts also point to the manner in which these commonly replicated news frames predispose journalists to cover certain types of events. As Desbarats (1990) points out, “events make the news more readily when they fit the reporters’ preconceived notions of what should be happening. . . . unexpected events that can be expected within frames of reference used by reporters are newsworthy” (p. 110). As Hackett (1991) explains, moreover, news frames are often determined in advance for pre-scheduled events:

Predetermined news angles facilitate newswork. They simplify such routine tasks as selecting interviewees, deciding which of an infinity of potential “facts” are relevant to the story, and meeting deadlines. Indeed, in some newsrooms, editors literally pencil in “angles” for projected stories days before they occur. (p. 261)

The existence of highly stereotypical, and often prejudicial, news frames, is therefore well supported in the literature. It should be emphasized, however, that the *existence* of frames, in and of themselves, is not the problem. As discussed above, interpretive frames serve many inescapable, and often positive, functions. They allow people to make sense out of a universe of potentially available information. And the comparison and contrast of diverse frames allows people to gain new insights, find new meaning, and even abandon previously held interpretations within that universe of

information. The problem arises when the same stereotypical and often prejudicial frames are replicated again and again throughout the news media uncritically. The mass dissemination of these highly uniform news frames further limits the breadth of perspective available as a resource to the public and its elected policy makers and may actually entrench problematic perceptions and interpretations of issues, events, and people. This theme will also be picked up again in Chapter Three.

*Ethical relativism.* One of the most subtle determinants of news discussed in this thesis is the professional obligation felt by newswriters to convey a posture of ethical relativism. In their bid for objectivity and public neutrality, journalists generally avoid the explicit discussion of ethical principles in the construction of their news stories, (as explicit referents, for instance, in analyses of social conflict).<sup>3</sup> Instead, the discursive universe of the press is characterized by a relativism in which conflicting or competing groups refer not to ethical principle but to self-interested pragmatism in the pursuit and justification of their goals. In such a universe, public decision-making often becomes a process of cost-benefit analysis in which the more powerful interests get to decide the variables in the cost-benefit equation (Christians, Ferré, & Fackler, 1993, pp. 57-60).

This state of ethical relativism in the press is, of course, part of a much larger and understandable *postmodern* response to centuries of intolerant and oppressive ethics rooted in rigid theologies and natural-law philosophies. But the extreme rejection of ethical

---

<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that news discourse is value free. For instance, in his analysis of American news, Gans (1979) asserts that a number of "enduring values" are implicit in the news, such as "the preservation of the freedom of the individual against the encroachments of nation and society" (p. 50). In addition, the better part of this chapter has drawn attention to other implicit commercial and ideological values in the news. Such implicit values are very different, however, from the explicit public examination and articulation of principle, as referents for social policy and practice. The following discussion, as well as the normative discussion on *ethical principle* in Chapter Three, should clarify this distinction.

principles is not without its consequences. In a collection of essays entitled *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (1993), Judith Squires summarizes the postmodern position and the challenge it presents to public discourse. According to Squires, “the postmodern condition is paralyzing in its deconstruction of all ‘principled positions’ ,” as it

involves the rejection of all essentialist and transcendental conceptions of human nature; the rejection of unity, homogeneity, totality, closure, and identity; the rejection of the pursuit of the real and the true. In the place of these illusory ideals we find the assertion that man is a social, historical or linguistic artifact; the celebration of fragmentation, particularity and difference; the acceptance of the contingent and the apparent. (pp. 1-2)

“In this context, out of this impasse,” Squires calls “for a move from tearing apart the pre-suppositions of western thought, to beginning the arduous task of re-thinking — the ‘hard road to renewal’ ” (p. 5):

If moralities, values and identities are not essential or absolute, if they are constructed and invented, then we must be concerned with the process of invention and articulation. This recognition is accompanied by a belief that our identities, values and moralities are constituted through communities. . . . Thus this path out of impasse asserts that rather than accepting a postmodern surrender to nihilism, we should look towards, and attempt to realize, communities in which there is the possibility of the development of a vocabulary of values in which all can share. (pp. 6-7)

“Principled positions,” she concludes, “are in need of political articulation” (p. 9).

In its current state, the press does not purposefully foster the public articulation of principle that Squires calls for as the basis of community. Rather, the press tends to occupy what it considers to be the neutral and apparently safe territory of ethical relativism. The contradiction in this position, however, is that relativism itself becomes a normative universal with significant social implications (Christians et al., 1993). Among these social



implications is the closure of the press as a public forum for articulating principled positions for public decision-making. This theme, once again, will be picked up in Chapter Three.

### **The Need for Reform**

The aggregate of characteristics examined above presents a picture of the Canadian commercial press as fundamentally motivated by profit, as opposed to public service; as generally cultivating a passive, not active, public; as emphasizing the entertainment value over the civic value of public affairs content; and as reluctant to critically examine dominant social values, perspectives and interests. It is a press that tends to emphasize events at the expense of issues, trends, and processes; drama and graphicness at the expense of problems and concerns requiring a degree of abstraction; individual personalities at the expense of organizations, groups, and communities; simplicity at the expense of complexity, subtlety, and context; and violence, conflict, and negativity at the expense of mutuality, reciprocity, service, and cooperation. It is also a press that tends to systematically privilege some sources over others and one that tends to disseminate highly stereotypical and often prejudicial interpretative perspectives, and that generally is reluctant to facilitate public dialogue grounded in reference to ethical principles.

In fairness, it should be stated that the press does not reflect all of these characteristics all of the time. It is not a monolithic entity. Different genres, different market niches, and different newswriters and organizations all determine the relative presence or absence of these characteristics. Nor are newswriters or organizations deliberately or even consciously promoting them — newswriters and organizations operate under a range of personal, economic, organizational, and cultural pressures. And many of them respond even to the same pressures in very different ways.

Exceptions can therefore be found to all of the findings outlined above. Nevertheless, research on the current state of the press is generally in agreement with these findings. And this agreement suggests, at least to me, the desirability of reform.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NORMATIVE ROOTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY PRESS

In order to approach the subject of reform it is first useful to place the subject in historical context. Specifically, in order to understand how the press might be reformed, it is helpful to answer the questions: How did the press come to operate this way in the first place?

Many possible explanations to this question have been proposed. A range of press histories have been written, variously emphasizing economic, political, organizational, and other social and historical forces. Undoubtedly each of these forces has exerted, and continues to exert, influence on the press. This thesis, however, is concerned primarily with a different force: the force of normative ideals. The focus on normative ideals, however, is not an effort to invalidate other explanations of the development of the press. Rather, the thesis conceives of normative ideals as one among a variety of interacting forces that historically shaped the development of the press and, perhaps most crucially, conceives of it as a force that *continues to legitimize its current structure and performance*.

#### **The Ascendancy of a Seventeenth-Century Normative Model**

The normative principles underlying the current operation of the Canadian press derive from the historical struggles of emerging Western liberal democracies. The outcome of these struggles was the establishment of *freedom of expression* and the *free pursuit of profit* as the twin operating principles of the Western press.

Press freedom, in this historical context, has a very specific meaning. It refers to the strict absence of state controls on the press: the ability of individuals to express themselves in print without government censorship or punishment. The pursuit of profit refers to the commodification of the printed word through the competitive, free-market

operation of the press. By the close of the twentieth century, these twin principles have become embedded within most Western democracies as naturalized assumptions about the way the press should operate.

But the naturalization of these twin principles tends to obscure their normative nature as well as the possibility of alternatives. Freedom and the pursuit of profit in the operation of the press are not universal constants like the co-efficient of gravity or the speed of light. Rather, they are socially constructed normative principles. And together they constitute a normative model — albeit a very simplistic one — of considerable social consequence.

The ascendancy of this normative model can be traced to seventeenth-century Europe, and to Britain in particular. As Keane (1991) notes, “in the European context, the long and drawn-out fight for ‘liberty of the press’s appeared first and most vigorously in Britain (from where it spread rapidly to America and, less energetically, to the Continent)” (p. 8). It is therefore in Britain that a historical re-examination of these principles should begin.

### **British Libertarian Principles: Freedom and Profit**

In seventeenth-century Britain, many parts of the population were struggling to free themselves from centuries of feudal authoritarian rule. Within such an environment, control over the operation of the press became a site of political and commercial struggle. In the sixteenth century, the British monarchy had established rigid press controls by conferring exclusive licensing privileges, requiring the registration and review of printed works, and prosecuting the publishers of dissenting perspectives. According to press historian Mitchell Stephens, the control of the press by the monarchy appears to have been “remarkably successful”; “with few exceptions,” Stephens (1988) has concluded from his historical research, “the press was not available to those who challenged authority” (p. 95).

These tight controls continued through the sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century, when civil war broke out in Britain, undermining the monarch's control. In the period that followed, press restrictions were largely unenforceable, and the population got a brief taste of press freedom. Authority, however, was quickly reconstituted under a victorious Parliament. Aware of the potential of the press as an instrument of political dissent, as well as the revenues that could be generated through state taxation of the press, the Parliament promptly reintroduced licensing legislation that would again censor, and tax, the press. But the population resisted.

Debate over the proposed legislation precipitated an early statement of normative principle that would become a powerful reference point in the struggle for a free press. In 1644, John Milton delivered a parliamentary speech defending freedom of expression in the press. In this speech, entitled *Areopagitica*, after the Athenian high court where the rights of citizens were defended, Milton condemned censorship as both impractical and morally unacceptable. While his primary motive may well have been his commercial self-interest as a writer, in his argument, Milton appealed to a Christian concern for the pursuit of "truth." He argued that people must be allowed to seek truth for themselves, as a God-given right, and that only through the publication of "evil" as well as "good" could truth be recognized, for "the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil" (1974, pp. 19-20). "Truth is strong," Milton wrote, "She needs not policies, nor stratagem, nor licensings to make her victorious" (p. 59).

With this argument, Milton introduced a self-righting conception of truth — derived from a largely theological position — into the struggle for press freedom. Subsequent liberal writers would secularize this concept, rephrasing it as part of an economic metaphor: the *marketplace of ideas*. Osler (1993) summarizes the modern version of this concept:

It is the belief that there is a self-righting process at work in the free marketplace of ideas. Most people will usually be inclined to select good and useful ideas from all they read, and reject the ideas that are bad or worthless. Thus, over the

long run, the marketplace of ideas may cleanse itself, and no censor or act of licensing is therefore necessary. (p.58)

Milton was not effective in averting the licensing act and, in the words of Stephens (1988), “the relative freedom the English press had experienced began to evaporate [as the Parliament] gradually reimposed most of the press controls the Tudor monarchs had perfected” (p. 171). Within the populace, however, momentum in support of press freedom continued to grow, motivated by the mutual reinforcement of political and commercial incentives.

In 1690, John Locke lent powerful support to both the political and commercial aspects of this struggle with his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which became a cornerstone of classical liberal thought. In his essay, on the one hand, Locke espoused an uncompromising individualism and a strong mistrust of state, implying a political role for the press as a free and independent watchdog on the state. On the other hand, Locke’s conception of natural rights — the rights of every individual to life, liberty, and property — spoke to the commercial struggle. For derived from these natural rights were not only the right to free expression, but the right to own, operate, and pursue profits through operation of the printing press: one of the primary means of public expression. Locke thus provided a strong normative foundation for the commercial freedom of the press.

Four years after the publication of Locke’s essay, the British Parliament ended official state censorship of the press. In practice, press freedom, in the sense of strict non-interference by the state, would be realized only gradually. Many legal and political skirmishes would still be fought over the next two centuries — most notably over the use of libel law as a mechanism of censorship through intimidation, as well as over various forms of taxation.

A generation after Locke had published his *Essay*, another powerful argument for the free press began to take form in Adam Smith’s economic philosophy. Smith — the intellectual father of modern capitalism — argued that the individual pursuit of self-interest

in an unregulated economy was the surest path to humanity's collective well-being. In his famous treatise on *the Wealth of Nations*, Smith made his well-known assertion that an "invisible hand" acted in a free market economy to ensure that the pursuit of individual self-interest translated into the greatest collective benefit (1910). Thus regulation was condemned and the pursuit of self-interest was exalted as a social virtue. While Smith did not apply his theory specifically to the operation of the press, his work was enormously influential within the struggle for press freedom. It provided the strongest argument yet for "the pursuit of profit" as a normative principle of the press, and to this day it is a bulwark to the Western operation of the press.

In 1859, the argument for a free press was advanced further by John Stuart Mill in his classic essay *On Liberty*. The second chapter of Mill's lengthy essay dealt specifically with "The Liberty of Thought and Discussion." In his essay, Mill made explicit the previously implicit argument for the press as a watchdog against the state. "Liberty of the press," according to Mill, was imperative as "one of the securities against a corrupt or tyrannical government" (1956, p. 19). Mill also revisited and amplified the "self-righting" conception of truth derived from Milton. Referring to the "peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion," Mill argued that it was

robbing the human race: posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (p. 21)

The arguments of Milton, Locke, and Mill represent only three prominent voices in a rich and complex historical struggle. Whether their individual motives were rooted in genuine humanitarian concern or in the interests of their own privileged class is a question that is certainly open to debate. Regardless of their motives, however, their words became normative reference points in struggles for the freedom of the press throughout the Western world. They firmly established freedom of expression and the free pursuit of profits as the

twin normative principles of the press in Western societies — principles that found renewed expression as recently as 1982 in The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### **Amplification in the United States**

The historical British struggle culminating in the ideal of a free commercial press represents, in the words of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), “the transfer of the press from authoritarian to libertarian principles” (p.44). This transfer, moreover, was occurring in Britain at the same time that American colonists were struggling for full political emancipation from Britain in the new world.

In the context of the larger American struggle for independence, the struggle for a libertarian press was embraced with tremendous fervor by colonial rebels. Press history in the United States thus followed the same course as Britain, but at an even more accelerated pace. The concerns expressed by Milton, Locke, and Mill were passionately restated and amplified across the Atlantic by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Thomas Paine, and other influential revolutionary leaders. A free press was perceived by the colonists as one of the “great bulwarks of liberty” in the new nation they were building (Madison, quoted in Altschull, p. 119) .As Jefferson wrote in defense of both a free press and a free America:

No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, . . . the fact that man may be governed by reason and truth. Our first object should therefore be, to leave open to him all avenues to truth. The most effective hitherto found is freedom of the press. (Lipscomb, Ed., 1904, pp. 32-33)

Because the American struggle for press freedom occurred as an extension of outright rebellion and in the context of the establishment of an entirely new and independent nation, the guarantee of press freedom was quickly taken up as a constitutional issue. The freedom of the press thus gained protection in the first amendment to the American constitution. This amendment — the first article of the Bill of Rights — specified that “Congress shall make no law. . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press”.

Thus, from the birth of the nation, press freedom became a fundamental article of American democracy, constitutionally reinforced and secured. This first constitutional guarantee of press freedom in the Western world, in turn, set a precedent that was later echoed in the constitutions of many other Western nations.

### **The Libertarian Model Imported into Canada**

In Canada, the early development of the press occurred in an imitative and somewhat compressed manner. At the end of the eighteenth century, at a time when a flourishing press existed in both England and the United States, British North America had only the most rudimentary printing industry. But this lag did not last long. As Osler (1993) describes, “a sort of telescoping of historic processes prevailed” as “Canadians attempted to make up for lost time once printing arrived in strength during the 1830s and 1840s” (p.86).

In the last half of the nineteenth century, newspapers became well-established in major Canadian population centres such as Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal — adopting the libertarian and commercial principles of the British and American press without significant debate. As Lorimer and McNulty (1991) explain:

the basic principles of press operation in Canada evolved from struggles fought elsewhere. These principles were not then critically re-examined for their appropriateness to the Canadian environment. Rather, it was more a case of trying to find a way of adhering to the principles in spite of the lack of journalistic evolution within Canada. (p. 57)

The first century of press operation in Canada was, therefore, primarily a process of catch-up, with little evaluation or rethinking of the underlying principles that drove the process. And the foundation laid at that time still supports the structure and operation of the press in Canada today, which is little different from the American and British models.



## **Press Reform Issues and Efforts in Canada**

In the first half of the twentieth century, however, Canadians began expressing increasing concern regarding the role and social purpose of the press in Canadian society. Especially prominent was concern regarding Canada's vulnerability to the import of culture and identity from the United States and, to a lesser extent, from Britain. Concerns about the inundation of American and British periodicals into Canada actually can be traced back to pre-confederation times (Kesterton, 1967). But after the turn of the twentieth century, these concern were transformed into significant public debate. As Osler (1993) writes:

By the 1920s, public debate on the state of Canadian periodical publishing and the competition it faced from primarily American sources had become both vigorous and articulate. Arguments that will be entirely familiar to modern Canadians of the satellite television era were being made in Parliament, pulpit, and press urging the introduction of measures both to protect the domestic periodicals industry economically, and to preserve Canadian lifestyle and cultural values in the process. (p. 166)

By 1931, the federal government responded to this concern by introducing a duty on imported publications — the first significant protective policy related to the Canadian press. But the concern was far from resolved. In 1951, the Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences in Canada reiterated the concern about the flow of cultural content from the United States. The report asserted that “the opinions, attitudes, tastes, beliefs and prejudices of Canadian citizens must be enormously affected, whether for good or ill, by [the] vast quantity of reading matter which so readily comes their way” through the periodical press (p. 60). It argued, moreover, that “probably few Canadians are aware that the news of the world which comes to them is largely gathered and written by Americans for Americans” (p. 63), and that

Canada is the only country of any size in the world whose people read more foreign periodicals than they do periodicals published in their own land . . .

American periodicals outsell [Canadian periodicals] by more than two to one in their own Canadian market. (p. 64)

This prestigious and influential report, while it did not generate specific recommendations for press reform, did lend credence to subsequent arguments in support of a government obligation to concern itself with the social purposes of the press — arguments that were reinforced by a precedent that already had been established in broadcasting regulation.<sup>4</sup> Many commissions and task forces examining press related themes followed. Among these was a 1961 Royal Commission on Publications, chaired by newspaper editor Grattan O’Leary. The O’Leary report sought to protect the cultural integrity of the Canadian press through the implementation of various tax measures, justifying them with the argument that

only a truly Canadian printing press, one with the ‘feel’ of Canada and directly responsible to Canada, can give us the critical analysis, the informed discourse and dialogue which are indispensable in a sovereign society.(p. 2)

Another examination of the press came with an extensive 1970 Senate study of the mass media, chaired by Senator Keith Davey. This study was the first to significantly broaden normative media concerns beyond the cultural import and identity issues that had historically dominated public and government consideration. The report was primarily concerned with media economics and ownership patterns — particularly ownership concentration. Its “most fundamental conclusion,” accordingly, was that “this country should no longer tolerate a situation where the public interest in so vital a field as

---

<sup>4</sup> Concerns over broadcasting ownership and content had prompted the Canadian government to form a Royal Commission on Broadcasting in 1928. By 1932, recommendations of the Commission were adapted and translated into law through the Canadian Radio and Broadcasting Act. The Act established the principles of both a permanent regulatory agency in broadcasting and a state-owned broadcasting service, which, through a series of subsequent permutations, evolved into the present-day Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

information is dependent on the greed or goodwill of an extremely privileged group of businessmen” (p. 67). The report went on to argue that

the principle is now well established that the state has a right to safeguard the public’s right to information by approving, disapproving, or disallowing various property transactions within the broadcast industry. The Committee believes it is time for this principle to be extended to include the print media. (p. 68)

The committee’s primary recommendation, therefore, presented the first official challenge to the libertarian principle of unrestricted freedom to pursue profit through the press. It recommended the establishment of a federal Press Ownership Review Board to represent the public interest by regulating future mergers and takeovers not only of the daily press but of weeklies and other periodicals as well (pp. 71-74). It also recommended the establishment of a federal Publications Development Loan Fund to foster diversification within the industry (pp. 78-79).

In addition to issues of ownership, the report also examined (and raised further questions about) advertising influence, institutional biases, news values and news definitions, news nets and flows, inter-media relationships, journalistic traditions and education, industry working conditions, media influences on the public, and public attitudes toward the media. Upon the completion of its study, and moved by concern over the quality and social impact of the contemporary press, the Committee urged the formation of a voluntary national Press Council to self-regulate and improve media quality and content. It also urged industry not to sacrifice quality at the expense of profit maximization, urged government and industry to establish post-graduate journalism scholarships to improve the quality of Canadian reporting, urged journalists and editors to organize in order to demand improvements in the quality of news and working conditions, and urged the public to guard against apathy and work toward creating a more “participatory journalism” (pp. 256-259).

The immediate impact of the Senate report was negligible. The government did not take up its recommendations, nor did industry, with the exception of three (fairly weak) provincial press councils that were formed in Ontario, Alberta, and Quebec, as well as a regional press council in the Windsor area. As the Senate Committee's chair Keith Davey suggested, however, the primary purpose of the study was to stimulate awareness and debate of media issues within the government, the press, and the public (1981, p. 231) — and this was perhaps a significant accomplishment in itself. Among other things, it provided a point of departure for the more ambitious Royal Commission on Newspapers, chaired by Thomas Kent, that followed a decade later.

The Kent Commission of 1981 professed to have been “born out of shock and trauma” in response to a series of newspaper takeovers, mergers, agreements, and closings in 1980 that were part of an alarming trend toward concentration of press ownership in Canada (p. xi) — a trend that had been forewarned by the Davey report. According to the Commissioners, the report reflected “the gravity of the situation within the newspaper industry and the intensity of public concern” (p. xi). Remarkably, the opening line of the report does in fact issue a bold challenge to the libertarian model and its principle of press freedom as a property right. “Freedom of the press,” it declares, “is not a property right of owners. It is a right of the people. It is part of their right to free expression, inseparable from their right to inform themselves” (p. 1).

The Commission documented in detail the concentration of media ownership that had been occurring in recent years, and, like the Davey report, condemned it as a threat to the public interest and to the democratic functioning of society. Also like the Davey report, the Commission examined a wide range of other factors influencing the construction and quality of news — although it did so in considerably more depth. But the Commission's final report went well beyond the recommendations of the Davey report. It recommended the establishment of a fairly powerful Canadian Newspaper Act, characterized by the following main features:

- (1) It would prohibit significant further concentration of the ownership and control of daily newspapers and of the common ownership of these newspapers and other media.
- (2) It would correct the very worst cases of concentration that now exist.
- (3) It would provide an incentive to the wider ownership of newspapers that change hands, and of new newspapers and magazines.
- (4) It would raise the status and enhance the freedom of journalists by protecting their rights, if a newspaper is under an ownership that has major interests outside the newspaper, and provide an opportunity for the voice of the community, whose citizens have a particular stake in the quality of the local newspaper, to be heard.
- (5) It would establish, in conjunction with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, a Press Rights Panel which would monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the legislation.
- (6) It would provide for a tax credit and a surtax to encourage newspapers to devote more of their resources to the provision of information.
- (7) It would provide matching grants to help to improve news services within Canada and for Canadians about the world. (pp. 237-238)

The report elaborated on each of these recommendations in considerable detail, including specific limits for ownership (pp. 238-241), targets for divestment (pp. 241-244), investment incentives (pp. 244-245), press-employee contractual arrangements (pp. 245-250), tax credits and surtaxes (pp. 252-254), news service responsibilities (pp. 254-255), and specific guidelines and powers for a Press Rights Panel that would monitor compliance with the above regulations and act, as necessary, as a "supreme court of record" for the press (pp. 250-252).

The Kent report thus clearly challenged one of the twin normative principles of the libertarian model. By proposing a clear role for government, it conceptualized the role of the press as an essential public service and a public trust, not to be abandoned carelessly to the operation of the free market and the unregulated pursuit of private profit.

The Kent Report was succeeded in 1982 by draft legislation intended to follow through on many of its recommendations. The legislation was never successfully

introduced,<sup>5</sup> but had it been, it would have been a unique statutory instrument among established Western democracies. While the legislation was never formally introduced, the fact that it was proposed and endorsed by many at such a high level of government remains significant. It suggests that Canadians may not be inexorably bound and committed to libertarian normative ideals. In addition, it provides a precedent from which future Canadian challenges to these ideals can draw support.

### **Other Normative Challenges to the Libertarian Press**

Outside of Canada, a range of other challenges to libertarian press ideals have also emerged in the last half of the twentieth century. A brief review of some of the more prominent of these challenges provides insight into other normative territory that has been explored.

*Soviet Communism.* Arguably the most sustained challenge to the libertarian press in this century derives from Soviet Communism, which for 70 years maintained a press that was radically different from the libertarian model. Although the Soviet Union's model of the press (and of communism itself) represents a significant departure from many of the ideals held by Karl Marx, an understanding of the Soviet press must begin with the theories of Marx.

Karl Marx, although a journalist himself, left little prescriptive theory regarding the operation of the press, other than a lifelong argument for freedom of expression and a lifelong condemnation of authoritarian control and censorship — which he had been a

---

<sup>5</sup> According to the chair of the Commission, Tom Kent, the primary reason it never made it into legislation was that by the time the Commission had finished its work and generated its recommendations, the issue had receded from the public agenda and the political will had therefore dissipated — the window of opportunity was missed (Kent, 1994). This conclusion is taken up again in Chapter Four.

frequent target of since his days as a student journalist in Prussia. From Marx's broader theories, however, can be derived two implicit principles that represent a direct challenge to the libertarian model of the press. The first and most obvious principle is that the press must become communal property in a communist society. Like all other means of production, it was rightfully the collective property of the workers, and on the historical path to communism they would eventually have to wrestle control of it from the capitalist class. The libertarian notion of private property and the pursuit of profit through the press was thus anathema to Marx's theories. The second principle is that the press was an instrument of class struggle. As part of the *Überbau*, or ideological superstructure of society, it was simultaneously a mechanism of capitalist control and a revolutionary weapon with which to transform *false consciousness* into *class consciousness*.<sup>6</sup>

With the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the political ascendancy of Lenin, the first experiment with a communist press began. Lenin had already, in 1901, provided an interpretation of how the press would function as the revolutionary instrument implied in Marx's theories: Aside from the dissemination of ideas, the press was to engage in "political education" and "the enlistment of political allies"; it was also to serve as a "collective propagandist," a "collective agitator," and a "collective organizer" (Lenin, 1927, p. 4). These principles became enshrined in the operation of the Soviet Communist press shortly after the 1917 revolution.

In practice, however, Lenin's references to *collective* translated more accurately into *party*. As the Bolsheviks consolidated their power they engaged in a steady monopolization of the press — in the name of the revolution and the working classes. By the height of the Stalinist era the Soviet press had evolved into an instrument of totalitarian influence and control — a strange reincarnation of the censorship and authoritarian control that Marx

---

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note, in this context, that Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and even Stalin were all practicing journalists during various periods in their lives.

himself had condemned. The Soviet media were thus conceived not as vehicles for the open expression of workers, but “as instruments for promoting the public good as defined by the state and the party which embodied the collective interest of the masses” (Curran, 1986, p. 123). As Curran (1991) explains:

The Communist Party as the custodian of scientific materialism has a ‘leading role’ — a euphemism for exclusive political monopoly — in co-ordinating the different elements of society in the realization of its common interests. The role of the media is defined within this framework: it educates people in the tenets of marxist-leninism; it aids the co-ordination and mobilization of the people in the tasks that need to be fulfilled. (p. 35)

Thus the justification that distinguished the Soviet model from earlier authoritarian incarnations can be understood, according to Siebert et al. (1956), as “based on economic determinism, rather than divine right” (p. 141).

The freedom of expression that Marx valued clearly did not develop within the Soviet Communist model, nor was the implicit ideal of the press as the communal property of a classless society realized. These ideals, moreover, have similarly not been realized in other countries that have tried to negotiate a path to communism. In each case the absence of a clearly articulated viable role for the press within the struggle to create a communist society from a revolutionary one-party state has resulted in its authoritarian control.

***Social Responsibility Theory.*** While far less radical in its philosophical underpinnings, arguably the most influential challenge to the libertarian model that has emerged in Western democratic societies can be summed up as *Social Responsibility theory*. In one version or another, Social Responsibility theory has informed normative discussions of the press in many Western countries, including Canada, during the latter part of the twentieth century. Its influence can clearly be discerned, for instance, in both the Davey report and the Kent report discussed previously. The theory, however, was



undoubtedly articulated most clearly and influentially in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States, and it is there that an examination of it begins.

In the period leading up to World War II, the excesses of a staunchly libertarian press became the object of intense criticism in the United States. Siebert et al. (1956) summarize many of the more recurrent indictments of the press from the period:

1. The press has wielded its enormous power for its own ends. The owners have propagated their own opinions, especially in matters of politics and economics, at the expense of opposing views.
2. The press has been subservient to big business and at times has let advertisers control editorial policies and editorial comment.
3. The press has resisted social change.
4. The press has often paid more attention to the superficial and sensational than to the significant in its coverage of current happenings, and its entertainment has often been lacking in substance.
5. The press has endangered public morals.
6. The press has invaded the privacy of individuals without just cause.
7. The press is controlled by one socioeconomic class, loosely the "business class," and access to the industry is difficult for the newcomer; therefore, the free and open market of ideas is endangered. (pp. 789-79)

These criticisms inspired significant debate about the role of the press in a democracy and led to calls for the press to exercise a new level of social responsibility in order to foster the more effective democratic functioning of society. Many of the criticisms that emerged in that period were embodied in a 1947 report by the privately sponsored Commission on the Freedom of the Press, produced at the University of Chicago. Under the leadership of the university's chancellor, Robert Hutchins, the report proposed a "Social Responsibility Theory of the Press" as a counter to the excesses of libertarianism. In its challenge to libertarian principles, the Commission argued that

the notion of rights, costless, unconditional, conferred by the Creator at birth, was a marvelous fighting principle against arbitrary governments and had its historical work to do. But in the context of an achieved political freedom the need of limitation becomes evident. The unworkable and invalid conception of

birthrights, wholly divorced from the condition of duty, has tended to beget an arrogant type of individualism which makes a mockery of every free institution, including the press. (p. 121)

The duties the Commission prescribed for a socially responsible press included the following: the duty to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them meaning; the duty to serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; the duty to project a representative picture of the constituent groups in society; and the duty to facilitate the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society. In addition, it prescribed the right for the press to have full access to the day's intelligence.

The Commission, while asserting that the press should continue to operate as private enterprises, urged the institutions of the press to assume these duties out of a sense of social responsibility. At the same time, however, it suggested the need for government to play an active role as guarantor that the press would actually do this (pp. 125-127).

Summarizing the underlying justification for the social responsibility theory articulated by the Commission and for the notion of potential government accountability that it contains, Siebert et al. (1956) write that

freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position under our government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society. To the extent that the press recognizes its responsibilities and makes them the basis of operational policies, the libertarian system will satisfy the needs of society. To the extent that the press does not assume its responsibilities, some other agency must see that the essential functions of mass communication are carried out. (p. 74)

The actual legacy of social responsibility theory is subtle and its precise influence is not easily assessed. On the one hand, a strong argument can be made that the press has not significantly reformed its operation since the Commission's recommendations were first ventured. As indicated in Chapter One, many of the criticisms that prompted the social

responsibility debate are as valid today as they were in the first half of the century. Nor — and this at least can be said with certainty — has any form of governmental accountability for the press ever been instituted in either the United States or Canada.

On the other hand, social responsibility theory has provided substance for widespread discussion and debate that continues even to this day. Elements of social responsibility theory are frequently invoked by the press in bids to enhance its image as a responsible provider of public service. Alternatively, politicians as well as citizens frequently try to call the press to account on various principles of social responsibility — often without even an awareness of the history behind the social responsibility debate. Social responsibility theory is also a common component of journalism education. Many of its basic tenets, moreover, have been adopted in diverse press codes of ethics, both at the level of individual institutions and at the collective level of journalism and newspaper associations. The Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association, for instance, issued a *Statement of Principles for Canadian Daily Newspapers* in 1977 that affirms many of the tenets of social responsibility. Its third article is actually entitled *Responsibility*, and it states that “the operation of a newspaper is in effect a public trust, no less binding because it is not formally conferred, and its overriding responsibility is to the society which protects and provides its freedom.”

In assessing the overall impact of social responsibility theory, it seems fair to say that on a conceptual level the theory seems to have widely influenced public and official expectations of the press (and perhaps even the press's expectations of itself). It also seems fair to conclude, however, that these expectations have not been translated effectively into actual press practice. Much of the apparent commitment by the press to social responsibility has proven little more than lip service. The libertarian operation of the press has not been significantly reformed. Freedom of expression and the pursuit of profit have remain the simple operating principles of the press. They also provide the basis for the

press's unyielding argument against external regulation or any form of governmental accountability.

*Variations on the Democratic Theme.* While the theory of social responsibility was clearly born out of aspirations for a press that would better serve democracy, many other variations on the democratic theme have also emerged in the last half of this century. Perhaps none of them has gained as much public attention or been as widely influential as social responsibility theory, but they are nonetheless important to acknowledge in examining the range of normative territory that has been explored.

Variations on the democratic theme cover a wide spectrum of ideas and practices that range from the high abstractions of Jürgen Habermas to diverse on-the-ground experiments of practicing journalists and editors. A comprehensive examination of the entire range of these variations would be a dissertation in itself and is well beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the cursory overview that follows is merely to acknowledge that a small but growing dialogue does exist on this theme and to suggest that there is a growing consensus on the need for more “democratic” media, however defined.

In the academic world, one of the more influential theories of democratic communication is arguably Jürgen Habermas' theory of *the public sphere* (1994). Habermas asserts that, in order for democracy to work, it requires a functional public sphere: a space in which citizens can engage in rational dialogue and critical deliberation regarding the affairs of society, freely exchanging views, expressing interests, and contributing to public decision-making. “Today,” Habermas further asserts, “newspapers

---

<sup>7</sup> Denis McQuail (1992) has attempted something of this sort in his overview of the field of normative media theory and policy issues in *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*. McQuail concludes that almost all normative media theory can be distilled into various interpretations of three elemental values: freedom, equality, and social order, which he then attempts to operationalize into evaluative criteria for public policy.

and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere” (1974, p. 49). Habermas (1984) elsewhere describes in considerable depth the *ideal speech situation* — which includes freedom, equality, symmetry, and rationality — that should define the public sphere.

Habermas’ writings on the public sphere have spawned a large body of secondary literature and analysis.<sup>8</sup> Frequently he is criticized for his extreme degree of abstraction, the difficulty of translating his ideas into practice, or his implicit exclusion of “non-rational” forms of expression. Even many of his critics, however, rather than dismissing the concept of a public sphere, seek instead to refine the concept, make it more conceptually accessible, and adapt it to existing political and economic realities. Some concept of a public sphere thus informs, either implicitly or explicitly, much current thought on the role of the mass media in a democracy.

Whether originating from a public sphere perspective or not, in the wider discourse on democratic communications there is one prominent idea that is almost universally expressed: it is the idea that the media of mass communication must facilitate more than simply the flow of information and entertainment within society. They must facilitate dialogue, deliberation, discussion, exchange — or whatever else such democratic communication might be called — between diverse segments of society, on issues of public interest. Anderson, Dardenne, and Killenberg (1994) capture this sentiment:

The primary role of journalism should not be either to inform or entertain. *The prime role of journalism in our view, and the only way by which it can survive as a viable institution in the public arena, is to take responsibility to stimulate public dialogue on issues of common concern to a democratic public.* (p. xx, original emphasis)

---

<sup>8</sup> Refer, for example, to the collections of essays on the subject in *The phantom public sphere* (Robbins, 1993) or *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere in the new media age* (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991).

The almost universally acknowledged counterpart of this idea is the conclusion that the current "marketplace of ideas" supposedly created by the libertarian model of the press is either too exclusive, too distorted, or too constrained to facilitate these communication processes.

Based on these related conclusions, a range of alternatives to the current operation of the mass media have been proposed. For instance, one of the simplest of proposals is an *access model* of the mass media, in which the media are viewed as *common carriers* of public expression, in a manner analogous to telecommunication systems such as telephone or mail services. Access models call for the regulation of infrastructure, but not content, and are based on the principle of universal access. Within such a model, any citizen or group with time and interest should be able to access the media to publicly express their perspectives. Representation under such a model is as direct as possible, with minimal professional mediation. The actual sites of media production, moreover, may be made directly available to the public. An example of such an access model in practice is community cable television, which allows diverse groups to produce and air their own perspectives, within the legal limits of free expression. The difficulty with the access model in mass media, however, is that it tends to be unable to attract an audience of significant size or diversity. In the case of community cable, for instance, programs *tend to speak past one another* on entirely different issues, *not to one another* in a focused manner. It is thus difficult to imagine focused and sustained dialogue on specific public issues, involving diverse segments of the population, emerging from a simple access model (refer to Lichtenberg, 1990, and McQuail, 1992, for further discussions of the access model).

Another closely related model is the *democratic-participant model* (Enzensberger, 1970; McQuail, 1983). The central idea of the model is the rejection of centralized, top-down, commercialized, professionally provided and controlled media in favour of multiple, localized, participant-owned and controlled media. The model, according to McQuail (1983), "expresses a sense of disillusionment with established political parties and with

media systems, which are seen as having broken faith with the people. There is also an element of reaction against the 'mass society', which is over-organized and alienating" (p. 132). Thus the model departs from the access model by emphasizing the creation of small-scale community media, as opposed to access to "mass" media.

Another model of a more democratic media form has alternately been called a *public service*, or *social democratic model*, and it is based on the idea that all forms of advertising-based commercial media will inherently fail to serve the democratic communication needs of a society, and therefore non-commercial, publicly-funded media of mass communication are required as an essential service within democracies (Keane, 1991; Picard, 1985; Williams, 1966). "The central rationale of the public service approach," states Curran (1986), is to create media that serve "the public good rather than the private gain" (p. 98). While specific variations have been proposed, the unifying characteristic is some form of collective or public ownership — which is seen as the way "to ensure true independence from vested interests, access and diversity of opinion" (McQuail, 1994, p. 239).

In Canada, the public service model is quite familiar in broadcasting, with CBC radio and television having provided some form of public service for decades. It is interesting to note that the Royal Commission on Newspapers received recommendations from a number of journalists for the establishment of a public service newspaper along similar lines: a Crown Corporation with the same independence as CBC radio and television, publishing a national newspaper with regional variations. The idea, however, was rejected by the Commission. According to chair Tom Kent (1994), the Commission felt that "print CBC," as it was labeled, was "a miserable choice" (p. 26). Print, it felt, may be more susceptible to political manipulation than broadcast media. And even if it was not, the public was likely to hold this perception. The Commission therefore concluded that a Crown Corporation press would have a difficult time establishing public credibility, and that

either it would yield to political pressures to some degree and be manipulative; or it would establish and retain its independence only by being bland and very dull, an expensive nullity. In neither case would the use of taxpayers' money be justified. (p. 26)<sup>9</sup>

Another model rooted in democratic aspirations has been alternately called the *development, or advancing model* (Altschull, 1984; McQuail, 1983). This model has been proposed primarily for countries en route from dependent, colonial, and often materially impoverished conditions, to supposedly independent, democratic, and materially prosperous conditions. Although variations of the model exist, McQuail (1983) summarizes their general emphasis as being on "the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries" (p. 131). He also suggests that in light of these developmental goals, "responsibilities of the media are emphasized above their rights and freedoms" and therefore "limited resources available for media can legitimately be allocated by government, and journalistic freedom can also be restricted" (p. 131).<sup>10</sup>

Much of the thinking around development models derives from discussions within the "development profession" regarding the need for a *New International Information Order*. These discussions gathered momentum throughout the 1970s and culminated in the United Nations commissioned MacBride report: *Many voices one world*, followed by the

---

<sup>9</sup> It is unfortunate that the Commission reached this conclusion so hastily. The two outcomes feared by the Commission certainly do not represent the only possible outcomes for a publicly funded national newspaper. The potential for such a public service press undoubtedly warrants further consideration. Unfortunately, in the current climate of government fiscal restraint and anti-big-government sentiments it is unlikely that such an option will be seriously considered again in Canada in the immediate future.

<sup>10</sup> While this is a popular variation of the developmental model, it is certainly not the only way that the media has been conceptualized as an instrument of developmental processes, and in Chapter Three of this thesis a very different developmental function of the press is posited.



*Mass media declaration* of UNESCO (MacBride, 1980; Nordenstreng, & Hannikainen, 1984). These reports did contain, in my opinion, many praiseworthy recommendations regarding the reform of global information disparities and dependencies, and the need to employ the mass media in service to the development of democratic societies.

Unfortunately, the international political will to follow through with the recommendations has yet to be mustered.

*New Journalism Movements.* While many of the models discussed above have been generated by academics, and in some cases considered by policy makers, a parallel search for new media practices has also taken place on the ground among many working journalists and editors. These “new journalism” movements, as they are sometimes called, comprise a wide range of approaches, but each has emerged as a distinct effort — however well-conceived — to strengthen the role of the media in its service to democratic society. In most of these movements, moreover, one can discern a shift away from the “straight” or “objective” reporting that was the almost unchallenged journalistic ideal during the first half of this century and toward a more subjective and probing style of journalism, born from the recognition that journalists were not merely holding a mirror up to the day’s events but were active participants in constructing the news.<sup>11</sup> Altschull (1990, pp. 312-324) provides an excellent summary discussion of many of these movements, and the following overview is particularly indebted to his discussion.

---

<sup>11</sup> It has been widely argued that this general trend began in response to the experiences of journalists being duped by the accusations and propaganda of the McCarthy crusades in the early 1950s, which they faithfully reported as objective recorders of the day’s “news,” thus becoming unwitting accomplices to the witch-hunt mentality of the era. A case can be made, however, that journalists were already questioning the distinction between objective facts and subjective interpretations well before the McCarthy era, and the McCarthy experience merely accelerated and reinforced the trend. For a further discussion of this subject, see, for example, *Joseph McCarthy and the press*, by Edwin Bayley (1981).

Probably the first among these movements has generally been referred to as *investigative journalism*. The roots of investigative journalism can actually be traced back at least to John Stuart Mill's conception of the press as a security against corrupt or tyrannical government (as discussed in Chapter Two), for investigative journalism implies a role for the journalist in aggressively tracking down and exposing corruption among public officials and within public life. The journalist thus serves as "the citizen's eyes and ears in scrutinizing the powerful" (Altschull, 1990, p. 263). Although traces of the tradition have thus been present since the inception of journalism, the investigative role, and identity, of many journalists was greatly intensified with the experiences of Watergate, when journalists became aware that they possessed the power to bring down not only corrupt low-level bureaucrats and elected officials but the actual president of the United States himself. Through this experience, an aggressive form of "gotcha" journalism has grown, in which the journalists compete for, among other prizes, the journalistic prestige that accompanies toppling a high public official from office through critical investigative reporting.

A closely related movement in journalism has been referred to as *enterprise journalism*. Enterprise journalism is in part a reaction against the public relations era, in which journalists have become the target of the communication strategies of public officials, corporations, and most recently even social activist organizations. The movement represents an effort among many journalists not to rely on information from public relations handouts and press conferences and instead to do the necessary research to uncover the "real" news and motives behind the public relations smoke screens.

Another related movement has been referred to as *adversary journalism* — a phrase generally employed by those who see it as an unduly cynical and destructive trend in journalism. Adversary journalism is similar to investigative journalism in that it implies a public watchdog role for the press. But it is not merely concerned with uncovering specific cases of public corruption. Rather, it situates the press as the permanent "foe of authority";

no matter who is in power, the adversary journalist is “eternally in the opposition” (Altschull, 1990, p. 318). In many ways, adversary journalism thus derives from a similar rationale as the concept of the *loyal opposition* that has become an institutional feature of British-style parliaments — including the Canadian Parliament. The basis of this rationale is the idea that opposition is essential if truth is to be tested and corruption challenged.

One of the more controversial journalism movements of recent decades is *advocacy journalism*, in which the journalist becomes an active spokesperson for a cause. The advocate-journalist rejects neutrality and objectivity outright and instead “picks and chooses among the available source material in search of weapons to help the cause” (Altschull, 1990, p. 318). Closely related to advocacy journalism is *underground journalism*, an advocacy form of journalism specifically associated with the counterculture of the 1960s, which challenged consumer culture and modern lifestyles, militarism and established power structures, as well as traditional politics and authority, and sought to engage journalism as an instrument of social action and resistance.

*Interpretive journalism* is yet another recent movement. In this model, the journalist seeks to become an expert analyst on the subject he or she is covering — doing extensive background reading, researching, interviewing, and even attending seminars if necessary — in order to gain a firm grasp of complex and controversial issues. Interpretive journalism thus requires immersion in the subject area in order to present in-depth and informed analysis from all sides of an issue.

Another recent journalism movement, which has been simply dubbed *new journalism* by Altschull (1990), rejects objectivity altogether in favour of becoming personally involved in the story itself for the purposes of examining the subjective roots of human experience. The *new journalist*, according to Altschull, “becomes a living breathing part of the story, using as his or her model the practices and techniques of the novelist” (p. 317).

In stark contrast to new journalism, *precision journalism* is a movement toward consciously adopting the methods of science as a tool for journalism in the attempt to present a “scientifically accurate” picture of trends and events in public life. The precision journalist thus focuses his or her research on primary source material, employs scientific sampling techniques, questionnaires, and surveys, and even hires professional researchers to collect data. Objectivity is the reborn ideal of the precision journalist (Meyer, 1991).

In a book entitled *The dissident press*, Kessler (1984) examines a journalism movement that does not fit neatly into Altschull’s summary, although it overlaps somewhat with the advocacy and underground models. *Dissident journalism*, or *alternative journalism*, refers to journalism that takes place outside of mainstream journalism, giving a voice to groups that have been denied access to the mainstream press. The dissident press, according to Kessler, serves both an internal and external purpose. Internally, it attempts to foster “a sense of unity and purpose” within the marginalized group; externally, it attempts to educate others about the group and present “ideas generally ignored by the conventional press” (p. 158). Examples that Kessler examines include the Afro-American community, utopian groups, feminists, communists, anarchists, war-time pacifists, and immigrants. It must be pointed out, however, that the dissident (or alternative) press is generally not the press of first choice for such groups. *It is not a preferred alternative — it is often the only alternative*, adopted when access to the conventional press has been effectively barred and no other options exist for public expression.

Another journalistic movement that must be acknowledged — and one that fits very centrally into the search for more democratic media forms — is the very recent movement coming to be known as *public journalism* (sometimes referred to as *civic journalism*). The public journalism movement started in the United States in the late 1980s, born out of “widespread professional dissatisfaction” with the state of the press (Charity, & Austin, 1994, p. i). In less than a decade, journalists and editors from dozens of newspapers around the United States have begun experimenting with public journalism principles.

Jay Rosen, professor of journalism at New York University, has played an important role in articulating these principles, which in several respects parallel the consultative model subsequently outlined in this thesis. In an essay entitled *Public journalism: First principles*, Rosen discusses a few of these principles (Rosen, & Merritt, 1994). "A public," Rosen writes, "is something more than a market for information, an audience for a spectacle, or a pollster's random sample. Publics are formed when we turn from our private and separate affairs to face common problems, and to face each other in dialogue and discussion" (p. 6). Public journalism seeks actively to foster such public dialogue and discussion by engaging citizens, listening to them, and giving them a public voice. It seeks to redesign political coverage by emphasizing "the concerns of citizens rather than the maneuvers of candidates or the machinations of insiders" (p. 9). It also actively seeks to identify the public's own agenda of priority issues, to legitimate this agenda, to focus its coverage on it, and to follow through with it until "public judgement" can be reached (pp. 12-14).<sup>12</sup> To do this, public journalism tries to change the tone of public discourse from confrontational to deliberative. It also challenges presumptions about the limitations of citizens and assumes instead that "average citizens are capable of intelligent judgement, mature understanding, and rational choice if offered the opportunity" (p. 18).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> The concept of *public judgement* was developed by Yankelovich (1991) in his book *Coming to public judgement: Making democracy work in a complex world*. According to Yankelovich, public judgement implies "more thoughtfulness, more weighing of alternatives, more genuine engagement with the issue, more taking account a wide variety of factors than ordinary public opinion as measured in opinion polls"; it also implies "more emphasis on the normative, valuing, ethical side of questions than on the factual, informational side" (p. 5). It "is the state of highly developed public opinion that exists once people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, understood the choices it leads to, and accepted the full consequences of the choices they make" (p.6).

<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to convey the subtlety of thought characterizing the public journalism movement in a brief summary description like this. For an adequate discussion of public journalism, the reader is referred to Austin (1994), Charity and Austin (1994), Rosen (1991, 1994), and Rosen and Merritt (1994).

The example of public journalism is, I believe, one of the more promising “democratic” movements in journalism today. It has benefited from a valuable interplay between critical academic insights and prescriptions, and practical newsroom experience and experimentation. It also appears, at the moment, to be steadily consolidating itself in far-flung newsrooms around the United States. The example of public journalism will be taken up again in Chapter Four.

In examining the normative roots of the libertarian model of the press, its import into Canada, various reform issues and efforts in Canada, as well as a range of normative alternatives originating outside of Canada, I have out of necessity compressed a massive subject into a very small space. Generalizations have admittedly been made, and many of the subtleties and nuances of this history, and these normative alternatives, have been left out. But the discussion in this chapter should at least have highlighted many of the important landmarks in the field of normative press theory and thus provided some context for the discussion that follows. Above all, if this chapter has reminded the reader that the press, as we know it today, is not a *natural* or *normal* or *inevitable* media form but is the institutionalized expression of specific normative ideals and commitments that should be open to challenge, then this chapter will have fulfilled its primary purpose.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CONSULTATIVE PUBLIC FORUM

As the preceding two chapters suggest, Canadians have secured a remarkable degree of protection for freedom of expression — a freedom that the citizens of many countries around the world have yet to secure. The “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression including freedom of the press and other media of communication” is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is the second of four “Fundamental Freedoms” set out at the beginning of the Charter to which all Canadians are constitutionally entitled, and it is certainly a freedom to be preserved. By itself, however, *such freedom of expression does not create a public forum within which the ideas, perspectives, interests, and concerns of citizens and groups can be exchanged, in a consultative atmosphere, with other citizens, other groups, and policy makers.* This is the central concern of this thesis. The libertarian press ethic, by itself, does not translate into an inclusive, consultative public forum. Moreover, it is widely used to legitimate press structures and performance that in many respects are contrary to this objective.

The libertarian model of the press was derived from a very specific struggle against feudal authoritarianism originating in the seventeenth century. Aspects of that struggle may still be relevant today, but social, political, and economic conditions have changed considerably since the seventeenth century, as have public needs and aspirations. The libertarian model of the press, I submit, has become anachronistic, and as Canada enters the twenty-first century it is time to reform it according to contemporary needs and aspirations. The consultative model proposed below is offered in an attempt to stimulate dialogue and reflection regarding these contemporary needs and aspirations. It implicitly acknowledges, and builds upon, many of the democratic aspirations expressed in the normative models and movements in Chapter Two. In addition, however, I believe it offers both a more detailed and more encompassing vision of the role the press could serve in society.

### Why a Consultative Public Forum?

In my past and present roles as labourer, student, parent, small business owner, high school teacher, and community activist, I have come to the conclusion that the communicative needs of contemporary citizens are not well served within the current operation of the press. People rarely have adequate opportunity to publicly articulate their ideas, perspectives, interests, and concerns regarding social policies and practices that affect their lives. I have also seen the same general conclusion widely expressed in my contacts with a large cross-section of the population. Many people are frustrated by their inability to make themselves heard — by the lack of a public forum in which they can be heard — on issues that they are concerned about. The typical results of such frustration, moreover, are apathy on the one hand and extremism on the other.

Citizens who know they cannot be heard publicly have very little incentive to speak or participate in civic life. Instead, they often become passive spectators, watching the political arena from the sidelines as others determine the policies and programs that will affect them. Civic initiative and leadership are thus often left to others, and civic apathy becomes a characteristic of a culture in which the voices of diverse segments of the population are systematically excluded from, or simply not invited into, the public arena.

On the other hand, groups that are *determined* to express themselves publicly are forced, in the absence of such a forum, to resort to increasingly extreme measures in order to put their issue on the public agenda. Marches, rallies, civil disobedience, illegal actions, and even terrorism have all become part of a culture of protest that dominates contemporary civil society, and all of these forms of protest have variously been invoked by groups seeking a public voice in Canada. Such protests, however, are often not the strategies of first resort for these groups. Rather, they frequently resort to them only when other avenues for constructive dialogue and change are unavailable or exhausted, and when they have become disillusioned with traditional political processes. Media-genic actions, or



“pseudo-events” as Boorstin (1980) has dubbed them, are thus staged as acts of strategic communication in order to momentarily force issues onto the public agenda. As the news value of these actions diminishes quickly with the passage of time, these same groups then watch their issues recede from the public agenda long before they have been resolved, or they are forced to continually escalate their tactics in the sort of guerrilla approach to public communications discussed in the introduction to this thesis. This approach may be effective for a while, but the escalation itself often polarizes the issues, distorts the original intent of the group, undermines their public credibility, and further reduces the chances for effective dialogue or resolution.

If apathy is to be overcome, extremism avoided, and a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society created, public forums must be available for genuine consultation and dialogue between the diverse peoples and interests of Canada, along with their elected representatives. The press has the potential to serve in this manner. Of course, transforming the press into such a forum is not all that Canadians will need to do in order to overcome the many conflicts and challenges facing them. Such an assertion would be hopelessly simplistic and naive. Political institutions are also in need of reform. Economic relationships need to be adjusted. Pernicious attitudes like racism and sexism need to be rooted out. And narrow obsessions with science, technology, and material development — as exclusive measures of social progress — will have to be transcended. But it is precisely in the context of these broader movements and goals that the need for press reform — the need for the development of an inclusive, consultative public forum — becomes most apparent.

An argument can be made, of course, that significant press reform is impossible without the prior reform of the political-economic relationships and social attitudes mentioned above. But I do not believe the question of reform is that simple. I suggest that all of the priorities outlined above, including press reform, are intimately connected. Both the need and the possibilities for press reform should be understood in the context of

diverse movements for social, political, and economic change that are occurring on many fronts. No one of these fronts is isolated. Progress on one front enhances the mutual possibility for progress on other fronts. They are all interdependent — all part of a complex ecology of social change.

I will return to this argument in Chapter Four. There is little point discussing the prospects and preconditions of press reform before the nature of the proposed reform has been clarified. The following two sections, therefore, will sketch the broad outlines of the consultative model that is being proposed. First, its objectives will be presented, and then its operating principles will be discussed. Together, these two sections will define the consultative model as proposed in this thesis.

### **Objectives**

Contributing to the development of a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society is the broad objective of the consultative model. But this objective is too general to be of much practical value. More specific, tangible objectives are needed, from which operating principles can be derived, strategies for implementation can be developed, and progress toward reform can be evaluated. Toward this end, the broad objective above can be divided into three component objectives: community development, collective decision-making, and conflict resolution. Each of these areas are being identified widely as growing public priorities, and each of them could be facilitated in part by the press. In practice, each of these objectives overlap and are closely interrelated. But as component objectives, each draws attention to different aspects of the civil society puzzle. Each is therefore discussed separately below.

- *Community development. A public forum is needed within which the grassroots emergence of cooperative attitudes, relationships, dialogue, ideas, and initiatives contributing to the enhancement and enrichment of community life can be fostered.*

Community development, as the term is used here, refers to the development of the social and political fabric of community life, from the grassroots up. It conceives of development as an organic, internally generated process, not an engineered, externally imposed one. It is therefore concerned with the cultivation of cooperative attitudes and relationships between diverse people and groups and with the emergence of constructive dialogue from these relationships. Ultimately, it is concerned with the practical ideas and initiatives to enhance and enrich community life that emerge from this dialogue.

Community development, in this sense, is as much a social and political process as an economic or technological one. It is concerned with the quality of life, not merely the quantity of life. It is measured more by the emergence of cooperative attitudes, relationships, dialogue, ideas, and initiatives than mere economic expansion or material acquisition. It prescribes the empowerment of citizens to collectively affect change in their own lives and in the conditions of their own communities, seeking to redefine political activity as personal civic responsibility, commitment, and service, not as the mere delegation of responsibility to others through an occasional trip to the ballot box followed by a withdrawal from public life.

Of course, many people are already engaged in this type of community development, and isolated forums do seek to foster these processes. The press, however, could vastly augment these processes by purposefully serving as a wide-reaching public forum for them. And it is uniquely positioned for this role. This is not to say that it should displace existing forums in the process. Rather, it should be viewed as a complementary forum that widens the scope of public involvement, serves as a link between other more

localized and specialized forums, and even encourages the creation of new ones. The press is thus uniquely positioned to serve as a *forum of forums*, so to speak.

As it currently operates, however, the press serves this process minimally at best. As discussed in Chapter One, the press's current tendency to address its audience as passive consumers and spectators, to present public affairs as something beyond the sphere of most citizens, and to systematically exclude the voices of many citizens and groups from the public arena all undermine the processes described above. If the press is to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and participatory civil society, will it not have to begin to purposefully foster and encourage the active participation of citizens in the development of community?<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> In recent decades, few terms have been spared the efforts of both academics and political activists to deconstruct their meaning and reveal the contradictions and unequal power relationships that are embedded in them. The term *community* is one of these terms. Cogent arguments have been made regarding the hegemonic and ideological implications of the term. These arguments draw attention to the manner in which the term has been used as a device for invoking conformity, compliance, the suppression of dissent, blind allegiance, and even fanaticism, as well as propagating a false sense of homogeneity, group identity, and consensus. The historical and political basis of these arguments is acknowledged here. But rather than condemning the term, these arguments should prompt us to rethink and clarify the concept of community. The term *community*, as used in this thesis, assumes that individuals and groups exist in social, political, and economic interdependence, with a range of shared, fundamental needs and aspirations. At the same time, the diversity of cultural expression that distinguishes individuals and groups within a community can be seen as a source of richness and collective strength. Community, therefore, need not imply uniformity, but can imply a unity in which diversity is valued as an essential condition and strength of community. This concept is similar to the ecological concept of community, in which the interdependence of the species that make up an *ecological community* is primarily characterized by symbiosis and mutualism, and the diversity of species is a measure of ecological strength, stability and richness.

On a similar note, the word *development* has also been the subject of considerable critique and deconstruction. These efforts draw attention to the manner in which prevailing notions of development have frequently resulted in discrediting traditional economies, cultures, and knowledge systems, imposing upon them externally designed schemes for reform, and leaving many of them impoverished, dislocated, and dependent. Again, I acknowledge this legacy; and again, I suggest the need to rethink and clarify our understanding of the term rather than abandon it. The term *development*, as used in this thesis, assumes that all cultures embody aspects that are worth preserving, enhancing, and building upon, as well as aspects that may well need to be re-evaluated, reformed, and sometimes even abandoned. It also assumes that cultures are fluid and adaptable phenomena and that the people within them engage in these processes all the time. The essential qualification here, I suggest, is that it must be the people *within* cultures, or communities, that engage in and direct these processes, determining which aspects of their cultures they will build upon or abandon. It should not be people external to the culture or

- ***Collective decision-making:*** *A public forum is needed to facilitate the flow of ideas, perspectives, recommendations, concerns, criticisms, and inquiries from diverse segments of the public to those who have been invested with public decision-making authority on their behalf; likewise, to facilitate the efforts of those who have been invested with public authority to acquaint the public with their plans and decisions, and to familiarize them with the circumstances, problems, concerns, and rationales that underlie them.*

Not all people can participate directly in all decisions affecting the life of a community. Aside from the physical barriers to direct democracy in a spatially dispersed country like Canada, most people do not have the time, the energy, or the desire to stay informed and participate in decisions on all aspects of public life. Most people are too busy trying to put food on the table, pay the rent, raise the children, wash the dishes, take out the garbage, and find a few moments at the end of the day to relax. On many public issues and policies, decision-making authority is therefore conferred through some form of elected representation. Whatever the form of this representation,<sup>15</sup> forums for more effective

---

community, except to the extent that they may be invited to offer outside perspective or experience.

<sup>15</sup> The prevailing liberal-democratic form of representation in Canada is, itself, arguably in need of significant reform. The intensely partisan, aggressive, adversarial electoral and decision-making procedures that characterize this system tend to translate elected representation into elite positions of power, not service, and into the pursuit of self-interests and constituent-interests, not collective-interests. Would it not be worth experimenting, for instance, with electoral processes in which nominations, campaigns, electioneering, and so forth, are abandoned entirely and elected positions are not actively pursued at all? Why not make public service truly a position of service by making *every* citizen eligible to be voted for and serve, and by making elected service a responsibility of citizenship and *a condition that accompanies the very right to vote*? In such a system, why not abandon parties altogether and have the freedom to vote for any other citizens with demonstrated personal integrity, with a history of commitment to the collective public welfare, and with the consultative skills needed to consult together with people of diverse backgrounds? Why not invest legislative decision-making authority in non-partisan assemblies of such elected individuals, none of whom would have individual authority outside of the assembly, nor

communication between the public and their elected representatives are essential to its optimal functioning and to engaging citizens as fully as possible in the process of public decision-making.

On any given public issue, there will always be segments of the population who want to stay informed and who want to be heard — or who want to bring new issues onto the public agenda. And while different issues will naturally draw different segments of the population into the public arena, the quality of communication between the public and their elected representatives will largely determine the effectiveness of public policies and decisions, as well as the level of trust, confidence, respect, and support that all segments of the public are willing to extend to their governments.

Governments are increasingly recognizing this fact. Witness the growing trend toward government-sponsored public consultations regarding natural resource exploitation, urban planning, and other controversial public issues. While these consultative exercises often prove to be superficial, they demonstrate a growing acknowledgment that the public is becoming less tolerant of traditional closed-door decision-making practices that cater to the needs of powerful special interests. Many segments of the public are therefore increasingly demanding credible forums in which they can contribute their ideas and perspectives to

---

differentiated positions of power within the assembly? And why not, after electing individuals based on the criteria above, allow them to function collectively according to the promptings of their own consciences, consulting with segments of the public as needed, and responsible to the public at regular election intervals, but otherwise shielded from the prevailing system of interest group liberalism in which public policy is dictated not by consideration of ethical principle and the collective public welfare, but by the dictates of the most powerful and effective lobbies?

A discussion of such far-reaching political reform, however, is outside the scope of this thesis. The questions above are posed primarily to suggest the possibility of alternatives to prevailing models of partisan-liberal democracy — models that have become so naturalized that alternatives rarely even enter into public discourse. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I submit that even within the current political system, the creation of more effective forums for communication between the public and its elected representatives would still assist in its improved functioning (and might even open up possibilities for more fundamental, long-term reforms).

public decision-making, ensure that their interests are represented, offer recommendations, concerns, and criticisms, and receive answers to inquiries.

Again, the press is uniquely positioned to serve as one such forum. Of course, many journalists and editors have traditionally aspired toward this service. But the state-of-the-press overview in Chapter One suggests that the press is currently performing this service poorly. The libertarian model of the press does not sufficiently support this objective. Instead, it tends to provide a forum for public communication that is primarily uni-directional, from elected representatives and other officially accredited sources to the public. And even this uni-directional communication is highly fragmented, simplified, and decontextualized.

- *Conflict resolution.* A public forum is needed in which the resolution of social conflicts can be fostered and the underlying causes of conflict can be publicly recognized and addressed.

In a pluralistic and multicultural country like Canada, conflicts between diverse segments of the population can have a paralyzing effect on civil society. Aboriginal rights disputes, separatist struggles, ethnic and religious animosities, labour disputes, environmental controversies, and myriad other ongoing conflicts undermine cooperation, divide communities, create social and economic instability, and retard social development. This is not to suggest that the parties to many of these conflicts are unjustified in their concerns, that the roots of all of these conflicts are imaginary, or that these conflicts should be swept under the carpet in the interests of promoting some false sense of social harmony. Rather, it is to suggest that we, as a society, have much to learn about recognizing and addressing the root causes of conflict before they occur, as well as resolving conflicts once they do.

In fairness, efforts are being made on these fronts. For instance, research into the underlying social, political, and economic causes of various social conflicts, as well as

research into ways of resolving them is being conducted from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, and university courses exploring these issues from these diverse perspectives are being offered. Popular books and articles are similarly being written, inviting larger audiences to reflect upon, and get involved with, these issues. Non-governmental organizations are emerging specifically to contribute to the prevention and resolution of often desperate and bloody conflicts. Grassroots organizations and community groups are beginning to experiment with new approaches to resolving and addressing the root causes of conflicts. These issues and skills are even being integrated into primary and secondary education curricula.

There is still, however, much to be learned — and practiced — regarding the just and equitable prevention and resolution of conflicts. In fact, many of the processes that pass for conflict resolution today are little more than politically engineered efforts to manage or suppress the expression of *conflict*, and they often divert attention away from the social injustices and power inequities that are so often at its root. As a result, many social activists and others who have participated in such processes have become understandably disillusioned and skeptical with even the suggestion of conflict resolution processes and forums.<sup>16</sup>

While I acknowledge the frustration that such experiences have bred, I think it is important not to lose sight of the real and frequently urgent need to resolve what are often deep-rooted and sometimes structural conflicts between diverse groups and interests in society. Do we want, we need only ask, to continue to be a society where conflicts and

---

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, many prevailing notions of conflict resolution have significant parallels with the notions of development discussed previously. Both, for instance, have been taken up by *experts* as something they are required, and qualified, to *do to* other people. In fact, both seem to have spawned entire growth industries in recent decades that have frequently left a legacy of disillusionment in their wake, especially among the people whom they have *done unto*. In contrast, the use of the term conflict resolution in this thesis implies that the parties to a conflict must themselves be the primary agents of its resolution, by engaging in genuine dialogue, reflection, and critical examination.



their underlying causes go unaddressed, festering under the surface, feeding continual eruptions of protest and violence, and leaving diverse segments of the population bitter, disillusioned, and oppressed? Or do we want to become a society that acknowledges the overlaying expressions and underlying causes of conflict, addresses them in a genuine and purposeful manner, and develops the skills, commitments, opportunities, and political capacities to resolve them?

I suggest that the latter are worthwhile, attainable, and widely shared social aspirations. I also submit that there are communicative principles and practices that lend themselves to their realization, and that these can be applied to a wide range of conflicts, within a variety of forums. I submit, moreover, that the press can be conceptualized as one such forum.<sup>17</sup>

Applying such principles and practices to the operation of the press certainly goes against the grain of its present commercial operation. As discussed in Chapter One, conflict *is* news. If anything, newswriters are currently under pressure to drum up conflict even when it hardly exists. They have few economic incentives to provide a forum for the resolution of conflict when it does exist. If the press, however, is to contribute to the development of a more functional civil society, I suggest it will have to rethink its exploitation of conflict as a market commodity. Could it not instead begin to serve as one of an increasing number of forums in which divergent values and interests are expressed and reconciled, in which stereotypes and prejudices are overcome, in which mutual

---

<sup>17</sup> I am not suggesting here that newswriters join the growing ranks of conflict resolution professionals, adopting the mission to actively manage and resolve conflicts for diverse social groups. Rather, when conflicts involve the diverse interests, attitudes, and perceptions of large groups, (or even entire populations) the mass media can serve as a uniquely suited forum within which these groups themselves can seek to resolve their conflicts. This implies that newswriters consider how to reform the operation of the media in a manner that (a) does not unnecessarily inflame or incite conflicts, and (b) provides the best possible communicative environment within which resolution can occur between large groups.

understanding and sympathy is fostered, and in which the entrenched social structures and relationships underlying many social conflicts are acknowledged and addressed?

From a communications perspective, it is helpful to consider two broad sources of conflict and how the press might foster their resolution. The first source of conflict is misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Both language and actions are symbolic media of expression, and the meanings that individuals or groups intend to express through their words or actions are often very different from the meanings interpreted by others. By extension, the motives of one individual or group in expressing specific words or actions are often interpreted as entirely different motives by others. This misinterpretation, moreover, is frequently the source of acute social conflict. As discussed in Chapter One, however, the press currently tends to seek out and exploit public expressions that lend themselves to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. It does this in a variety of ways, by relying on sources that represent the most extreme positions within an otherwise more moderate population, by simplifying expressions, by taking statements and actions out of context, by playing on stereotypes and prejudices, and otherwise framing public affairs in ways that enhance their potential *conflict value*. From the objective of conflict resolution, however, the press could instead serve as a forum in which the intended meaning and motives of such expressions and actions are consciously probed and clarified, carefully presented in context, and framed in ways that dispel prejudices and stereotypes, minimize the chances of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and thereby reduce conflict.

On the other hand, another acute source of conflict resides in those forms of expression and behaviour, as well as those social structures and relationships, that are systematically and purposefully discriminatory, exploitative, or oppressive. In such cases, the problem is not one of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. It is one of injustice. The press, of course, cannot act as a legislative or judicial body in addressing injustice. It can, however, provide a forum in which such injustices are publicly acknowledged,

investigated, and analyzed — in which they are kept alive in public discourse *until they are actively addressed through legislative, judicial, and other mechanisms.*

For the press to serve as such a forum would, of course, only be part of the solution to most social conflicts. There are many dimensions to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and communication is only one of them. Conflicts that are the result of purposeful discrimination and exploitation, for instance, require organized and resolute public action. But even such action, and the legislative and judicial solutions that they should prompt, can be empowered and reinforced by genuine public consultation regarding the underlying nature and sources of the injustice.

All three of the objectives described above overlap and are intimately related. Community development, collective decision-making, and conflict resolution cannot easily be separated as distinct processes. They have been separated above merely to provide categories for the purpose of analysis. The achievement of each objective actually contributes to the other, and collectively they contribute to the overarching objective of developing a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society.

In a similar manner, each of the operating principles that follow are intimately related to each other, and supportive of all three objectives. No individual principle or set of principles can be associated exclusively with one objective. They are all principles of what I will refer to as the consultative process, and it is the collective application of these consultative principles that supports each objective.

### **Operating Principles**

Community development, collective decision-making, and conflict resolution are all subjects that are being theorized in increasingly abstract and mathematical terms by an army of academics. Complex economic development formulations abound. Sophisticated mathematical models of management and decision-making are proliferating. And

exceedingly abstract theories of conflict resolution, such as game theory, are in vogue. All of these theories leave the layperson bewildered, intimidated, and excluded from the very processes they need to engage in.

Associating consultative principles with these objectives may give the misleading impression that they are similarly abstract, mathematical, or incomprehensible. Indeed they are not. Their application can be considered an art, not a science, and many of them are already applied daily by individuals and groups from all walks of life. I suggest that they are basic principles of group communication that, when practiced in concert with the appropriate motives, patience, care and respect, and a degree of personal detachment, make up the consultative process.

In describing these principles, I am drawing on over a decade of active experience — and experimentation — with them. I have consciously participated in and observed their application (and lack of application) in a variety of settings, including workplaces, classrooms, student societies, cooperative organizations, and community groups, in Canada and abroad. And while I have come to recognize their practical value through these experiences, I have also come to recognize that they are not easy to internalize and translate into practice. Neither are they something that can simply be imposed. Effective consultation can only emerge out of mutual dedication and commitment. Reforming the operation of the press, as well as the public's interaction with it, along the lines of these principles, would require such dedication and commitment.

In order to extrapolate consultative principles to the operation of the press, a simple analogy is useful: The relationship between the press and the public can be compared to the relationship between a facilitator and the members of a group participating in a roundtable consultation. The function of the press, like the facilitator, is to facilitate consultation by ensuring that mutually acceptable consultative principles are followed. Of course, the analogy has its limitations. For example, in a small group meeting it is often possible for the facilitator to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to voice an opinion. The press, as

a facilitator of public discourse, obviously cannot give every citizen a voice on every issue. Nevertheless, many consultative principles can be adapted by the press as it seeks to facilitate public discourse. These principles include:

- *Complexity, subtlety, and context.* Complexity, subtlety, and context must be acknowledged and addressed if meaningful initiatives, decisions, and resolutions are to be generated from the consultative process.

Effective consultation requires that participants have access to a sufficient level of background information and knowledge regarding the issue on the table. In order to arrive at informed decisions, they must be able to consider the issue in its fullest possible complexity, subtlety, and context. Reducing a complex issue to a single simplistic narrative, interpretation, or set of facts does not provide the adequate background understanding for this to happen.

The tendency of the press to simplify and decontextualize complex and subtle issues was discussed in Chapter One. It places fundamental constraints on public consultation. As a facilitator of public discourse, the press must find creative ways to overcome this systemic tendency. Change will be required on several levels if this is to happen.

On the most basic level, many journalists and editors will need to rethink any assumptions about the public's incapacity to grasp complexity, subtlety and context. The practice of some journalists who write to an assumed lowest common denominator — *dumbing down* the news as journalists say — is antithetical to the development of a competent and functional civil society. It is also arrogant: an insult to public intelligence. Certainly, when complex technical and academic jargon is involved, journalists have a responsibility to translate that jargon into language that is meaningful to the layperson. But there is no justification to assume that lay people cannot grasp the complexity, subtlety, and context of issues if they are presented in a lucid manner, in language with which they are

familiar. If anything, overly simplifying and decontextualizing issues in order to present them to a public that is assumed to be civically incompetent is a self-fulfilling practice that may well breed civic incompetence.

But assumptions about public intelligence are only part of the problem. The press, in its current operation, in part lacks, and in part is unwilling to commit, the resources needed to provide the public with adequate background on complex issues. Journalists rarely receive adequate training and resources to thoroughly research and present complex issues. The deadlines that have come to characterize the frenetic production of fragmented and instantaneous news also rarely allow for depth and insight in the presentation of issues. Fewer well researched articles, even if they are not cheap or immediate, would likely constitute a more valuable contribution to civic discourse than the current deluge of instantaneous and often superficial news. But journalists need the time, resources, and skills to probe and clarify perspectives on complex issues. The trend toward generalist reporters may also need to be reevaluated. Coverage of complex contemporary issues, such as those associated with the environment, require from journalists a degree of specialization and background familiarity in order to grasp the issues and translate them into language that is accessible to the layperson.

Creative strategies *can* be devised in order to ensure that adequate resources are available for these purposes. For instance, as a facilitator of public discourse, the press does not have to assume full responsibility for all of the background research, investigation, and writing required to adequately present complex issues. The function of a facilitator is not to dominate consultation by acting as the sole source of knowledge and information. Rather, the facilitator's function is to enlist and invite the widest possible range of contributions from all participants, many of whom are, themselves, in the best positions to provide adequate background information, knowledge, and perspective — even in publishable form.

This leads us to the next principle:

- *Diversity of perspective.* Consideration of a diversity of reasonable perspectives, from the widest range of sources possible, is a means to collective insight and understanding.<sup>18</sup>

The diversity of perspectives that characterizes the Canadian public is an indispensable public resource. Endowed with the wealth of tremendous cultural and experiential diversity, Canadians would be well served by purposefully and systematically drawing on this collective inheritance. The degree to which we develop this collective capability is the degree to which we effectively tap one of our most valuable national resources.

The press, as a facilitator of public discourse, has a responsibility to ensure that the widest range of reasonable perspectives are represented. To be fair, some effort toward this end has historically been made. But the systematic privileging of some sources, and exclusion of others, based on social, economic, or political status, seriously undermines this function. It represents an entrenched pattern of operation that impoverishes public discourse. In its current operation, the press systematically recognizes some voices from the floor, and systematically excludes others.

If this pattern is to be overcome, the press must first make a conscious effort to ensure the representation of segments of the population lacking the sophisticated public communication strategies, skills, and resources that are often present in the public relations departments of government and industry. Adequate human and financial resources will have to be devoted to this end. In addition, abuses of representation by resource-rich and

---

<sup>18</sup> By *perspectives* I am referring to the sum of perceptions, values, and interests, derived from culture and experience, that determine an individual's or group's interpretation, or *frame*, of issues and events. And by the term *reasonable* I mean to exclude racist, sexist, fascist, and other hateful or discriminatory expressions that deliberately seek to discredit and demean the perspectives of other groups.

PR-savvy segments of the population need to be controlled. The communications strategies of such privileged sources should not be allowed to dominate or manipulate public discourse.

But addressing the imbalance of public communication resources will be only half the battle. Press workers will also consciously have to confront personal and organizational sources of bias, such as the beliefs, attitudes, values, routines, and pressures that influence journalists and editors in their work. These include, for example, beliefs about the relationship between political figures, scientific experts, and citizens; they include (often subtle) attitudes and stereotypes based on racism, sexism, and class distinction; they include values attached to material versus non-material aspects of individual and community life; and they include news-gathering routines and pressures that consistently filter diverse perspectives out of the media. Uncovering these internal sources of bias will require systematic and ongoing processes of reflection and education within newsrooms and journalism schools.

As a facilitator of public discourse, the press must strive to overcome its internal, and often systemic, prejudices and learn to recognize all voices from the floor, within reasonable limits. Of course, this leads to the question of what is a reasonable limit? This is an exceedingly difficult issue that is embedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, where "reasonable limits" are applied not only to freedom of expression but to all rights and freedoms. I would argue that these limits must, in a general sense, be gauged by the degree to which the freedom of one individual or group begins to undermine the welfare of others, and of society as a whole. Granted, the exact line defining such welfare will always be difficult to draw exactly. On the other hand, consensus already exists in Canada about the limitation of many freedoms of expression, such as hate literature and other forms of discriminatory expression. Clearly racist, sexist, fascist, and other expressions that deliberately seek to discredit and demean the perspectives of other groups do not have a legitimate place in public discourse.



I acknowledged that excluding such perspectives from public discourse is an extremely difficult and often controversial process in itself. Such expressions can often manifest themselves with great subtlety, and gray areas will always exist. But wrestling with these gray areas is nothing new. It is part of what defines our humanity. What would be new would be a conscious and systematic effort by the press to represent the wide range of perspectives that clearly *are* within reasonable limits, and yet are systematically excluded by its current operation.

- *Accuracy of representation. Diverse perspectives only become collective resources if every perspective is represented in a manner that is as accurate and faithful to the original intent of its source as possible.*

In a small group, it is possible to ensure that every individual is in a position to communicate his or her own perspectives directly to the group. Each person can be assured an opportunity to present his or her sentiments as accurately as possible through the medium of speech. And speech is not merely the spoken equivalent of printed language. Speech is enriched by the nuances of tone, pitch, volume, timing, etc., as well as other para-linguistic nuances such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and so forth, that are absent from print. Speech is therefore a relatively unmediated form of communication that allows for a tremendous subtlety of expression.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, representation in the press is highly mediated. Printing is itself a layer of mediation that robs communication of many of the nuances discussed above. But in addition to the mediating nature of print itself, journalists and editors mediate what makes it

---

<sup>19</sup> It must be emphasized that even speech is mediated by differences of assigned meaning and interpretation that derive from differences of culture and experience. These differences will always represent a partial barrier to “accurate” communication.

into print and in what form it is finally printed. By selecting, summarizing, editing, and paraphrasing sources, the press imposes a layer of mediation that would be entirely unacceptable for facilitators of real-time consultative forums. Yet the physical and operational constraints of the press dictate that, to a certain extent, this mediation is unavoidable. Brevity and conciseness, for instance, are necessary on a printed page where space is limited, and expressions that are not brief or concise need to be edited or summarized in some manner.

But if the press must mediate, or *re-present*, the perspectives of diverse sources, can it not do so with more care than it currently does? In mediating the expressions of others, the press has a responsibility to ensure that all perspectives are represented in a manner that is as accurate and faithful to the original intention of the source as possible. Misrepresentation is, again, antithetical to the consultative process (it is also, for that matter, antithetical to existing ethical codes of journalism). Yet, as discussed in Chapter One, it systematically happens within the current operation of the press.

If a relatively accurate and faithful representation is to be accomplished, journalists and editors need to be aware of, and resist, tendencies and pressures to superimpose their own interpretations, or frames, on them. Thus, while journalists must often translate lengthy (and sometimes highly technical) perspectives into concise and accessible language — they can strive to do so without compromising the original intent. Accurately conveying diverse perspectives on issues is as important as accurately conveying the background, or “facts,” associated with issues. Opportunities for sources to represent themselves as directly as possible, or to verify the accuracy of representation before publication, would go a long way toward this end.

Again, one caution needs to be raised. Accurate and faithful representation of diverse perspectives does not imply that the press should act as a naive and indifferent conveyor of communication strategies that seek to manipulate the public through misinformation, false accusation, and so forth. The American press was caught up in a

web of exactly this sort during the McCarthy era in the 1950s, when it became an unwitting accomplice to McCarthyism by blindly conveying the accusations that were the ammunition of the McCarthy crusades. Subsequent realization of their complicity in the McCarthy hysteria forced many journalists and editors to reevaluate their responsibilities to the public and to adopt a much more critical stance in relation to the political communications emanating from public officials. But such complicity still occurs in subtle and often unwitting forms. It is also connected as much to the strategic communication practices of the private sector as it is to the public sector.

The press, in its potential role as a facilitator of public consultation, would therefore continue to have a responsibility to screen out deliberate attempts to manipulate the public through misinformation and false accusations. Again, this is one of those gray areas that does not lend itself to simplistic definitions or criteria. Journalists and editors will have to constantly wrestle with these issues as they encounter difficult judgement calls. But this responsibility need not be interpreted in such an extreme manner that it undermines the fundamental principles of ensuring diverse and accurate representation in the press. The risk of abuse should not eclipse the overarching commitment to diverse and accurate representation.

- *Moderate tone of expression. Moderation in the tone and mode of expression is as important to the consultative process as the content that is expressed.*

Freedom of expression need not be interpreted as a license for extreme and divisive modes of expression. Ridicule, humiliation, insult, and other offensive, demeaning, and conflict-inducing modes of expression undermine the consultative process. Yet they have become the norm for much of what passes as public communication today. As discussed in Chapter One, the press shares some responsibility for this state of affairs.

Might not freedom in the latitude of our public expression be best gauged by the same courtesy, respect, dignity, and care that we expect or appreciate from others in our

private communications, even when we hold different perspectives? I submit that these fundamental qualities of expression have profound practical implications on any level of discourse. Their neglect diminishes our willingness and capacity to listen to, understand, and sympathize with others. It results in alienation, polarization, and the breakdown of communication.

I suggest that the press has an opportunity to foster such a tone of public expression. Rather than seeking out and emphasizing extreme, conflict-inducing modes of expression, the press is in a unique position to foster the careful exercise of free expression. In this respect, the press has an advantage over the facilitator of a roundtable meeting that occurs in real-time. For while the real-time facilitator often cannot anticipate or influence the tone of expression that will develop in a meeting, the press can. It is under no obligation to print expressions that threaten to undermine the entire consultative process. Rather, the press is in a position to work with its sources, when necessary, to rephrase inflammatory and divisive expressions before they are printed. (Ironically, this is quite the opposite of how the press generally operates at present.) I suggest, moreover, that this can be done without compromising, delegitimizing, or excluding the perspectives and experiences of diverse sources.

For instance, fostering a moderate tone of public expression need not imply glossing over conflicts that are indeed very real, by demanding that sources bury their differences and speak to each other in polite civil tones. On the contrary, it implies finding and facilitating modes of expression that allow conflicting perceptions, values, and interests to be examined critically, but in an atmosphere of tolerance and a spirit of mutual commitment. To do this, conflict has to be contextualized within a view of human nature that asserts the human capacity to overcome it and establish cooperative and reciprocal relationships. For some, acceptance of this view may first require a critical reexamination of the proposition that conflict is an inevitable and determining expression of human nature. But I submit that mutuality, reciprocity, service and cooperation can be emphasized as

attainable patterns of human interaction. Conflicts can be understood and presented as soluble challenges that are encountered, and can be overcome, in the process of building just and equitable social structures and relationships.<sup>20</sup> And expressions of conflict can occur within this context.

Fostering a moderate tone of public expression also need not imply a cold, rationalistic public discourse in which emotion has no place. On the contrary, emotion is fundamental to human experience and perception, and any effort to foster mutual understanding and sympathy cannot ignore it. The emotional dimension of people's experiences and perceptions can, however, be conveyed without the offensive and defensive posturing that we have grown so accustomed to associating with emotional expression. For instance, anger and shock, distress and grief, suffering and affliction, even when experienced as a consequence of the injurious or exploitative actions of other individuals or groups, can be expressed without attacking, insulting, or humiliating those same individuals or groups. And in my experience, resisting the tendency toward such offensive posturing is the only effective way to raise self-awareness in others of the consequences of their actions, and hence cultivate in them the actual will to reform.

Finally, fostering a moderate tone of expression must never be interpreted as a license to dismiss diverse sources as coarse, uneducated, or irrational, and thereby exclude them from public discourse. On the contrary, the implication is to create a public space where we can all collectively *learn* more constructive modes of expression, not a space

---

<sup>20</sup> There is good reason for conflict to continue to be a central subject of the press: It is a very real aspect of human experience, and one not to be swept under the carpet. But conflict need not be exploited as an entertainment value or commercial commodity. The focus on conflict in the press could, alternatively, be for the purpose of contributing to its resolution. In order to do this, divisive perceptions, values, and interests must vigorously and continually be examined. But they cannot be examined effectively, still less can resolution be reached, in a charged atmosphere that offends, polarizes, and alienates the respective parties to the conflict.

where perfection in such expression becomes a precondition to entrance (as if such perfection even exists).<sup>21</sup>

What I am suggesting, then, is merely that the press has an opportunity to begin cultivating more constructive modes of public expression — expression that can be gauged by the degree to which it becomes a catalyst, and not a barrier, to mutual sympathy, understanding, and sometimes even consensus.

- *Suspended judgement. Consensus can only emerge from diverse perspectives if an attitude of suspended judgement is maintained during the consideration of other, often conflicting, perspectives.*

Collective decision-making and conflict resolution are most successful when carried out in an atmosphere of suspended judgement. Effective consultation often results in the emergence of perspectives that are greater than, and sometimes quite different from, the diverse perspectives that were originally contributed. This is impossible, however, when prejudgement, or a rush to judgement, prevents the consideration of alternative perspectives and obstructs the emergence of new ones.

The concept of suspended judgement is well illustrated in the following comparison of dialogue and debate:

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement. *In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter arguments.*

---

<sup>21</sup> I would also suggest that the very process of allowing previously marginalized and disenfranchised segments of the population into public discourse may mitigate some of the expression of hostility and frustration that they have traditionally felt, and that has contributed to perceptions of them as “coarse” or “irrational.” Hostility and frustration are often, in part, a result of a lack of empowerment, and inviting these segments of the population into public discourse is at least a small step toward empowerment and the alleviation of frustration and hostility. (Of course they also need to be invited into the political and economic arenas of power in society!)

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. *Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.*

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. *Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.*

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it. *In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.*

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. *Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.*

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions. *In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.*

Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution. *Debate assumes there is a right answer and someone has it.* (Study Circles Resource Centre, 1993, p. 15)

Another way of looking at suspended judgement is again through the analogy of a roundtable meeting. In such a meeting, individuals can be extremely attached to their personal ideas and insist on defending them, or they can strive to be detached from their ideas and be willing to openly and honestly consider the ideas of others. Consultation becomes most effective in the latter case. Each idea is a potentially valuable contribution to the discussion at hand, but only if participants detach their self-identity and estimation of self-worth from their ideas. Once offered, ideas can become a collective resource for the entire group, to be taken up or discarded, synthesized or revised, as best serves the collective purpose.

Achieving this attitude of suspended judgement is not easy, even within a small group. Revisiting basic assumptions and beliefs — especially when they have become intertwined with one's self-identity — can be an extremely difficult task. But I submit that it is a prerequisite for meaningful consultation, and that it *can* be learned. This does not imply that people should become paralyzed by operating in a perpetual vacuum of assumptions and beliefs. It merely implies a willingness — an openness — to the

occasional reconsideration of assumptions and beliefs. In the operation of the press, the cultivation of suspended judgement implies soliciting and presenting diverse perspectives not as absolute and entrenched positions, but as relative perspectives and flexible positions — as collective resources in the consultative process.

It should be noted that suspended judgement, as the term is used here, also does not imply that all perspectives are equally valid or necessarily true. It should not be equated with extreme relativist views, in which the world is nothing more than a social construct and all perceptions, values, and interests are equally valid. The logical extension of such philosophical positions is to validate the perspectives of discriminatory and oppressive groups, such as those who deny the holocaust, or even those who committed it. Such a position is clearly not in accord with the other principles of the consultative process described in this thesis. Suspended judgement need not extend to such extremes. Rather, suspended judgement can coexist with an assumption that the world does exist apart from social constructions, that fundamental governing standards of human relationship can be identified, and that social institutions and processes can be governed by these standards. Suspended judgement implies, however, that our individual perspectives on these standards, and their application, are all limited by culture and experience.

Suspended judgement, furthermore, does not imply downplaying or glossing over differences of perspective. In fact, it implies quite the opposite: It implies paying extremely close attention to those differences, listening to them, and probing for clarification of their exact nature — but in an atmosphere that supports and encourages diverse people to express themselves, and to know that their diverse perspectives are welcome. The establishment of such an atmosphere, it should be noted, is especially important if the perspectives of less aggressive and less socially confident people are to be elicited (people who are often, but not exclusively, the minorities in any population).

It is toward the establishment of this atmosphere that journalists and editors could play a role as facilitators of public consultation. For instance, newswriters could first seek



to learn and establish this attitude in their individual lives and in the culture of the organizations they work for (if they haven't already). They could also strive to demonstrate and express it in their interviews, focus groups, and other interactions with diverse sources (if they don't already). They could even promote and publish ongoing discussion and reflection about suspended judgement in the pages of the press itself. They could also publish it as part of their mission statement, and involve the public in evaluating their success in establishing such an atmosphere. Many creative ways could undoubtedly be found to encourage such an atmosphere, over time, within the press. <sup>22</sup>

- *Ethical principle. Constructing public discourse around reference to principle provides a context in which just and sustainable solutions to social problems can be devised and implemented.*

Ethical principles, for the purpose of this discussion, can be understood both as fundamental *preconditions* and *referents* for the creation of just and sustainable social relationships and structures. For instance, a just and sustainable society cannot be founded on inequity between the sexes. Equal rights, opportunities, and respect must be accorded both sexes, and reference to this principle must therefore inform social policy and practice. This is a matter of ethical principle. Nor can such a society be founded on discrimination derived from such spurious distinctions as race. A parallel principle applies. The accumulation of extreme wealth and the spread of poverty are further causes of acute suffering and perpetual social conflict and instability; the elimination of both extremes is again a matter of ethical principle. The exploitation of natural resources in a manner that

---

<sup>22</sup> The goal of this principle, as well as all of the others described in this thesis, of course, is not that newswriters become some kind of public thought police — public enforcers of such principles and attitudes. Rather, the goal is that they gradually assist in fostering the development of a universe of discourse that is characterized by these principles and attitudes.

destroys ecological systems and impoverishes present and future generations is similarly unjust and unsustainable; ecological stewardship and inter-generational responsibility are corresponding ethical principles that must correspondingly be applied. I suggest that all social relationships and structures, if they are to be just and sustainable, need to be established through the determined application of ethical principles such as those outlined above.

Ethical principles are thus criteria with which social policy and practice can be measured, directed, and evaluated. The conscious and determined reference to ethical principle is, moreover, the means of reconciling an open and inclusive consultative process with the requirements of social justice. This is because it does not leave the consultative process *open to any result*. It leaves it open only to those results that conform to ethical principle.

Reference to ethical principle is therefore inextricably linked to the three objectives of the consultative model. The first objective, community development, in its broad social and political sense, involves publicly articulating these principles, reaching consensus around them, and applying them as guides not just to individual behaviour, but to collective action and initiative.<sup>23</sup> The second objective, collective decision-making, involves applying

---

<sup>23</sup> For example, one of the forums in which the public articulation of ethical principles has been carried out most aggressively in this century has been the United Nations system, which has, at least on paper, forged global consensus around many such principles. This process of articulation and consensus building gathered momentum in the first year of the United Nation's existence, with its promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed three years later without a dissenting vote in the General Assembly. The Declaration, together with its related Covenants, established the principles of universal education, freedom of movement, access to information, the opportunity to participate in political life, the freedom of thought and belief, and the freedom of expression, among others. Subsequent articulations of principle are embodied in the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the Declaration on the Human Environment, and the Declaration on the Environment and Development. And while the United Nations has in many respects been hamstrung by a lack of international political will in its efforts to apply and enforce the principles embodied in these declarations, they have nonetheless become powerful tools for

ethical principles as reference points in problem-solving and policy-making, and as means of formulating, comparing, and evaluating diverse options and courses of action. And the third objective, conflict resolution, involves applying ethical principles in an effort to transcend particular interests and arrive at social policy and practice that best protects and promotes the collective welfare.<sup>24</sup>

I further suggest that public discourse based on ethical principles creates a very different social dynamic than discourse based solely on pragmatics. It shifts public discourse toward a new centre, in which the instrumental rationality of politicians, professionals, and academics is balanced by the ethical judgements and aspirations of all citizens. It thus provides the voices of marginalized, oppressed, disenfranchised, and silenced minorities a renewed legitimacy in the public arena, leveling the playing field of public discourse for them, and redressing the power asymmetries inherent in most social conflicts. As discussed above, it also provides a focus with which social relationships and structures can be critically reexamined, standards with which policies for social change can be formulated, and direction with which practical measures for achieving these policies can be devised and implemented.

Purely pragmatic discourse, on the other hand, operating in an atmosphere of ethical relativism, does not provide the same foundation for just and equitable decision-making. Rather, it encourages the entrenchment of self-interested positions and rarely facilitates the emergence of consensus. In purely pragmatic discourse, instrumental rationalities prevail

---

non-governmental organizations and social movements around the world seeking to insert ethical principle into public discourse and call governments and powerful economic interests to account on them.

<sup>24</sup> Again, this does not imply that the interests of diverse groups, such as minorities within a population, should be delegitimated within public discourse and the formulation of public policy, or that they should be neglected in the abstract interests of some vague and undifferentiated public. On the contrary, it recognizes that the expressed interests of some groups (often politically and economically dominant groups) frequently impinge on the welfare of others, and in such instances the firm application of ethical principle, not the lobbying of competing interests, will best protect and promote the welfare of the latter.

and, as noted in Chapter One, decision-making is reduced to a process of cost-benefit analysis in which dominant interests determine the variables in the cost-benefit equation. Such discourse frequently alienates large segments of the population and results in outcomes that plant the seeds for future conflict, injustice, and social instability.

I submit that public discourse *can* be raised to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism, and that the press is a potentially valuable forum in which this can occur. As discussed in Chapter One, however, the current operation of the press does not foster this process. It can be argued, of course, that the press does construct the news against an implied background of enduring values or ethical norms.<sup>25</sup> But even if such ethical norms are implied in news reporting, this falls far short of the focus proposed here. Constructing public discourse around reference to principle requires the active and explicit articulation of principles that can serve as referents for social policy and practice, not the passive and implicit suggestion of vague ethical norms. It also requires explicitly applying those principles in the formulation and analysis of public policy and practice. The process I am describing is a deliberate, conscious, and systematic one.

It is toward making this process deliberate, conscious, and systematic that I suggest newswriters could play a role. For instance, many newswriters could, without too much difficulty, develop the skills needed to probe and clarify the ethical principles that underlie (or fail to underlie) public policy suggestions, proposals, and alternatives, and they could keep these underlying principles alive and focused in public discourse. In the process, they could also facilitate the emergence of consensus around ethical principles themselves.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> The argument asserts, for instance, that crime stories are selected and constructed in a manner that implies the ethical desirability of lawfulness, or that stories on the subject of racism imply the ethical desirability of overcoming racial prejudice.

<sup>26</sup> It can be argued, of course, that consensus around matters of principle is the most difficult kind of consensus to reach. But I see the issue differently. In my experience, the type of ethical principles that I have discussed have such a resonant appeal to most people's sense of justice and equity, that the vast majority of people in our society already instinctively respond to them. And if the United Nations system has managed to forge explicit consensus around such principles — among politically divergent and often hostile interests

One caution, however, does need to be raised. In invoking ethical principle as a basis for public discourse and social policy, there will inevitably be those who tend, on the one hand, toward the kind of intolerant and self-righteous moralizing characteristic of religious extremists, and on the other, toward the didactic moralizing that has characterized the party-press in many state-socialist societies. I do not believe, however, that either of these tendencies constitute such potential threats to Canadian society that we should forego experimenting with more moderate and constructive methods of applying ethical principles to social concerns. Better, I suggest, to wrestle with these tendencies than to perpetuate the tremendous power asymmetries inherent in our current brand of public discourse based on the pragmatic pursuit of competing self-interests.

Finally, the call to construct public discourse, policy, and practice around reference to ethical principle is not merely a naive or pious admonition to some vague notion of virtue and morality. I submit that it is a powerful and proven practice with very real political implications. Consider the historical struggles for social justice — women's movements, civil rights movements, labour movements, post-colonial independence movements — that have been empowered by their determined commitment to ethical principle. Consider the number of prominent representatives of these struggles — Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, or most recently Aung San Suu Kyi — that have empowered their causes by their consistent public appeal to ethical principle. Such struggles, certainly, are far from over, and set-backs have been and will continue to be experienced. Historically,

---

from every nation on earth — surely we can forge similar consensus in Canada. The primary challenge, I submit, is not forging consensus around principle. It is learning how to consciously employ principles as referents within consultative processes, and thereby consistently apply them to matters of social policy and practice, both as formulative and evaluative tools. Certainly, translating principle into practice will produce varying interpretations, and the application of principle is therefore not an easy process. But all the more reason to make the process a systematic and conscious one. In addition, an equally important challenge is creating policy (and enforcement) mechanisms with the political independence to refuse the influence of those segments of the population that obscure or resist the application of principle when it exposes the discriminatory and exploitative nature of their pursuits.

however, these struggles have been greatly empowered when they have successfully maneuvered public discourse out of the quagmire of competing interest claims and into the court of ethical principle.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROSPECTS FOR REFORM

Having examined the basic objectives and principles of the consultative model, it is time to turn to questions of implementation. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to present a *how to* guide for the model's practical application, in terms of specific newsroom skills and practices. Answers to these questions can only be worked out by practicing journalists and editors (perhaps with the collaboration of media theorists and researchers) who decide to engage with the model and explore that site where normative ideals interact with practice, each shedding light on the other. The purpose of this chapter, rather, is to consider the overarching obstacles and opportunities for implementing the model, as well as the broad strategies that, if pursued, could enable the type of reforms proposed in the model.

The chapter will begin by discussing the nature of reform as a historical and cultural process. This discussion will include the suggestion of realistic expectations regarding the manner and rate of reform. Next, the chapter will examine four fronts within which the movement for reform would most likely have to be pursued if it is to be effective: the public, the press, the political economy, and the academy.

#### **Reform as a Historical Process**

Meaningful press reform is incomprehensible within the short-term planning horizons and quick-fix time-frames that characterize so much of contemporary public life. If the practicality of the consultative model is assessed by the prospects for its immediate and wholesale adoption, then obviously it is grossly impractical. Vested interests and entrenched traditions within the press would undoubtedly resist such reform. Resistance might also be felt from powerful sources and clients whose self-interests are best served by

the current operation of the press. Nor is there sufficient economic incentive or political will to radically embrace such reform at this time.

But if press reform is viewed in a broad historical context, its prospects look somewhat more promising. In sixteenth-century Britain, the immediate prospects for a free press looked dismal. The political economy was not ripe for reform; the monarchy enjoyed absolute authority over the operation and taxation of the press and had little reason to forfeit control. Nor had sufficient popular pressure built up to force the issue of reform. In the seventeenth century, however, conditions began to change. The authority of the monarch began to erode as popular pressure simultaneously mounted. As discussed in Chapter Two, the ideals of a free commercial press were publicly articulated for the first time during this period, when traditional structures and relationships were being challenged. It took another century for the ideals of a free commercial press to become established in practice, but established they were. A model of the press that was unthinkable in an earlier era has provided the entire Western world with its operating principles — so much so that the model has largely become an assumed background norm, the *natural* way to do things in a democratic society.

There was therefore nothing immediate about the process that led to the adoption of today's libertarian model of the press. It was a historical process that spanned generations. Suggestions regarding its practicality in the sixteenth century would likely have been scoffed at. In hindsight, however, the process can be interpreted as the playing out of a broad historical imperative in which narrow self-interests eventually succumbed to more broadly shared, popular interests. In this case, the narrow self-interests were located in the British aristocracy, while the more broadly shared interests were located primarily (but by no means exclusively) in the literate, entrepreneurial classes in Britain. It should also be remembered, in this context, that the authority of the British aristocracy had been considered absolute for centuries, and the power of the entrepreneurial classes had always



been subordinate. From a sixteenth-century perspective, the prospects for reform must have appeared remote.

The situation has some parallels today. The possibility of significant press reform seems unrealistic to many because the economic incentives and political will for reform have been generally lacking throughout the twentieth century. But there are signs that suggest incentives might be developing. Respect for the press is at a fairly low ebb, journalists are experiencing a crisis of identity, and readership is falling — each of which is placing pressures on newswriters and owners to reconsider the way they operate (Canada. Royal Commission on Newspapers, 1981; Desbarats, 1990). In addition, big-government and big-business — arguably the two primary sources and beneficiaries of the press as it currently operates — also appear to be losing public trust, and their authority and interests are being challenged from many directions. At the same time, a groundswell of frustration with the dysfunction of the public sphere can be discerned among citizens, interest groups, the academy, and even among many politicians and business leaders.

This is not a suggestion that radical reform is imminent. We are not going to wake up to it tomorrow, next week, or even next year. Expectations regarding the pace of reform have to be realistic. Reform of entrenched social structures and relationships takes time, as history has demonstrated. Rather, it is a suggestion that reform over the long-term is an attainable goal that is worth pursuing and that the conditions for mobilizing reform are potentially present. It is also an appeal to begin consciously exploring and exploiting these conditions in order to facilitate and encourage the process. Ultimately, it is an appeal to move beyond the short-term planning horizons that dominate modern political life and begin laying the foundations for long-term, meaningful social change.

In order to do this, it is necessary to identify the various fronts on which movement toward reform needs to occur; to identify the agents, the incentives, and the possibilities for action. The following discussion suggests that the movement for reform needs to occur on four fronts: the public, the press, the political economy, and the academy. In isolation,

any of these fronts will likely prove inadequate. Reform will proceed most effectively only to the degree that it is pursued on all of these fronts.

The following analysis, therefore, is a *survey of the field* so to speak — an inventory of the social resources available for reform. It is an attempt to situate seemingly isolated reform efforts in a coherent context and to move past cynicism in order to recognize and create practical possibilities.

### **The Press**

Press reform begins within the press itself. If it is to succeed, journalists, editors, boards of directors, and owners will have to examine and reform the traditions, the codes of conduct, and the operational imperatives that affect the press. They will have to re-evaluate their public role and consider what operational changes would better serve the development of a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society. Fortunately, these groups do have incentives to engage in this process.

In 1980, the Canadian Royal Commission on Newspapers described a “national consensus” around the belief that journalism “has lost its vitality”(p. 135). Canadian media researcher Peter Desbarats offers a similar conclusion. “Journalism,” he writes “has lost much of its credibility” (1981, p. 7). Both in the court of popular perception and in the findings of academic researchers, the press is increasingly being implicated in the bankruptcy of contemporary political life and the stagnation of civic discourse. Journalists sometimes receive little more public esteem than the politicians they report on — and both are often perceived as part of an exclusive class of political and media elite that are out of touch with the lives of ordinary citizens. According to the Royal Commission, journalism is not a highly respected profession in society today, and “journalists are increasingly concerned about declining public confidence in them and in the written press in general” (p. 109).

Journalists today also operate under tremendous workplace stress, with few personal or professional rewards to compensate. Loss of market share and a declining readership, combined with rising costs of labour, capital, and raw materials, are forcing newsrooms to tighten budgets. As a result, staff are being cut and restructured, workloads increased, and support for investigative reporting, in-depth analysis of issues, as well as professional specialization and development are all being minimized. The newsroom is therefore becoming an increasingly stressful working environment at the same time that journalists are confronting a crisis in public esteem (Desbarats, 1990, pp. 93-95).

But beyond public esteem and newsroom economics, many journalists are also facing a crisis of self-identity. Members of the public and the academic community are not the only ones dissatisfied with contemporary journalism. A growing number of journalists are themselves increasingly dissatisfied (Canada. Royal Commission on Newspapers, 1981, p. 31). Many, initially attracted to the public service nature of the profession, become disillusioned in short time by its failure to contribute to substantive civic discourse. The result, especially when combined with the factors discussed above, has been an exceptionally high rate of attrition among journalists (Canada. Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, 1970, p. 65). According to Desbarats (1990):

Disillusionment, skepticism about the commitment of employers to journalism, poor management practices, and lack of opportunity for professional development probably contribute as significantly as low salary levels to one of Canadian journalism's most severe chronic problems: the constant depletion of talent. The relative youth of journalists, as documented in the surveys quoted earlier, and the low number of average years of experience, point to the problem of journalists leaving the business — particularly the most talented ones. (pp. 93-94)

Journalists and editors therefore do have incentives to reform. In addition, owners also have incentive to reform. As Rosen (1991) states it, "a healthy public sphere is, in some respects, in the circulation interests of newspapers" (p. 273). And creating that healthy public sphere will require, among other things, reform of the press.

In light of these incentives, many newswriters are beginning to question their traditional roles and search for alternative approaches in their work. This search is evident in the proliferation of *new journalism* movements that have emerged in recent decades, as discussed in Chapter Two. While these movements illustrate the search for new modes of operation, I submit that they fall short of the goal proposed in this thesis of developing a more inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society. To the degree they have established themselves, most of them have simply tended to replace one type of closed forum with another.

One of the more promising exceptions to this appears to be the *public journalism* movement, also discussed in Chapter Two. The movement is committed to ideals that parallel the consultative model in several respects. It views citizens as active participants in public discourse and political life. It actively seeks to facilitate constructive dialogue between citizens so that they can contribute to public policies, pursue social reforms, and take civil initiatives. It also consciously attempts to replace confrontation with purposeful deliberation as a dominant mode of public discourse.

Unfortunately, the public journalism movement is such a recent phenomenon that it has had little time to prove itself. There has been even less opportunity for any rigorous, third-party analysis of its application. To date, almost everything available in print on the movement has been written by those scholars and newswriters who are spearheading the movement itself. There has therefore been a good deal of promotion but little evaluation. With that said, however, anyone interested in the prospects of the consultative model proposed in this thesis would do well to follow public journalism closely. It is so far the closest approximation of the consultative model in practice. Analysis and evaluation of its successes, and limitations, will therefore yield valuable insights into prospects for the reforms proposed in this thesis.

One lesson that can already be derived from the public journalism movement, despite its nascent state, is that even within the current political economy of the press,

significant latitude for reform and experimentation does exist. The public journalism movement appears to have strong appeal among a growing number of journalists, editors, and even entire newspapers who are now actively experimenting with its application, and coming out with a product substantially different from the traditional press. An example will best illustrate.

In 1992, the *Wichita Eagle* launched a *People Project* that tried to engage area residents “in a search for solutions to problems governments seemed unable to solve: faltering schools, crime, political gridlock, and stresses on families trying to cope with competing demands” (Austin, 1994, see *Wichita: People Project*). The *Eagle* examined each issue in depth, “attempting to penetrate to ‘core values’ that often stand in the way of resolution.” It provided names and addresses of organizations working toward solutions and invited residents to write, phone, or fax their “ideas about what’s wrong and how to fix it.” With the assistance of Wichita State University researchers, in-depth interviews “about social ills and public problems” were conducted with 192 residents. Public forums were also sponsored in which citizens could discuss their concerns, “meet others trying to change things and find resources with which to act.” For nine weeks, the *Eagle* made itself fully available for “an informed community discussion of critical issues” and “a search for solutions” (Austin, 1994, see *Wichita: People Project*). So what did it look like in the paper? It had

continuous front-page placement. Long features with enough background to explain the problem and generous quotes from residents; charts and graphics challenging readers to think through their opinions on public issues and understand what the paper called “competing core values”; profiles of individuals and their success stories”; boxes with repeated reminders to . . . contact the *Eagle* with comments or suggestions; lengthy lists of organizations to contact for help or to volunteer — all under the logo “Solving it Ourselves: the People Project.” (Austin, 1994, see *Wichita: People Project*)

The initiative required a full-time reporter, editor, and artist, as well as four more part-time journalists as needed. After the project was complete, the response in the

newsroom was very positive. Editor Buzz Merritt commented that it was “a liberating thing for those who’ve been in journalism a long time to realize that maybe there’s a different way to approach it. . . a better way of newspapering, a different tone and attitude that can be applied to everyday journalism.” Response from the community was similarly positive, and the *Eagle* has since followed up with other “People Projects,” one focused on health care issues and another on employment (Austin, 1994, see Wichita: People Project).

The *Eagle* has since launched three other initiatives based on the success of the *People Project*. It has embarked on an “opinion mapping” project to identify the places in which meaningful community dialogue takes place and to identify the people engaged in such dialogue, so that reporters can “get in on the ground floor of public concerns” and assist in carrying them forward to action or resolution. The *Eagle* has also developed an initiative to cover and chart grassroots community efforts to solve their own problems. The goals are “to celebrate and detail successes, to encourage others and offer a road map of solutions [and] to keep the work in the public eye.” The initial focus of this initiative has been on grassroots efforts to address crime, violence, and deteriorating housing. Finally, the *Eagle* has created a full-time public journalism beat with the freedom to experiment freely with public journalism approaches and to work with other beats within the newspaper to develop similar approaches (Austin, 1994, see Wichita: People Project).

The *Wichita Eagle* initiative is only one of a diverse range of approaches to applying the ideas of public journalism.<sup>27</sup> But it demonstrates that traditional modes of operation of the press *are not* carved in stone, that incentives for reform *are* felt by many newswriters, and that if journalists and editors are willing to take the initiative, reform *can* occur.

---

<sup>27</sup> Many of these initiatives have been collected and summarized in *Public life and the press: A research report*, which in its latest editions examined more than 40 public journalism initiatives across the United States (Austin, 1994). The report is updated quarterly and is available in both an abstract form and a longer version, with details on each experiment. The report is not exhaustive but represents the diversity of creative approaches and initiatives being taken.

Of course, the consultative model proposed in this thesis differs in several respects from the public journalism model — most notably in its assertion that ethical principles are essential referents within public discourse as well as in its more conscious and deliberate orientation toward the resolution of social conflicts and their underlying causes. Both models, however, are dialogical in nature, and both conceptualize reform within the press in a similar manner: Dialogue, reflection, evaluation, experimentation, and refinement are not just discursive practices that newswriters should be fostering within public discourse — they are also the methods that journalists and editors themselves will need to practice in order to bring about press reform. These practices therefore need to be widely stimulated, encouraged, and developed within the press.

By themselves, of course, even such internal efforts will inevitably run up against external constraints. While press reform may begin within the press, internal efforts will undoubtedly need to be reinforced and complemented by efforts on each of the other fronts discussed below.

### **The Public**

Internal efforts to reform the press will be extremely limited unless they are accompanied by changes in readership preferences and expectations. The commercial press, as discussed in Chapter One, has a unique market relationship to the public; the public is simultaneously consumer and commodity. The product of the commercial press is not merely content, but also readership. Its service is not merely delivering content to readers, but also delivering readers to advertisers.

Readership, however, is a very unusual commodity. It is a commodity that in part determines the means of its own production. By purchasing a newspaper or magazine, people are participating, via market mechanisms, in defining the content that secures their

attention — and in turn transforming themselves into a commodity.<sup>28</sup> As Hackett (1991) explains:

If the audience can indeed be conceptualized as a commodity, it is a commodity unlike any other: It participates in its own production. It shares complicity, as it were, in its own positioning. . . . Consequently, a struggle to change the media is also a struggle to change audiences, and their relationship with the media. (pp. 70-71)

Fortunately, such a struggle is not merely a remote theoretical proposition. Real incentives already exist. Many people are growing weary of the constant barrage of sensationalism, negativity, and conflict that emanates from the press. At the same time, citizens and interest groups from across the political spectrum are frustrated with the lack of public discourse regarding issues that are meaningful to them. Given these incentives, the struggle to change the public's relationship with the media is being taken up in several public arenas.

One of the most notable of these arenas is public education. Critical analysis of the mass media is widely becoming an element of public education curricula under the various titles *media studies*, *media education*, or *media literacy*. Primary and secondary school educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers are gradually recognizing the need for students to develop the skills to critically assess and interpret the mass media — to dig below the surface of media content and examine how it is constructed, how issues are framed, what biases are reflected, and what factors of production and culture shape it. In British Columbia, for instance, the Ministry of Education has called for media education to be integrated into all subject areas from kindergarten to grade 12.

---

<sup>28</sup> The influence of readership on content must be qualified with an acknowledgment that many other factors also influence press content. It would be more accurate to conceive of a complex interplay between the preferences and expectations of readers, the news judgements and traditions of journalists, and the ideological, economic, and organizational pressures discussed in Chapter One. Nonetheless, audience preferences and expectations are a factor in determining content.



A wide range of activity is being generated by this trend. Curriculum developers are working to create media studies materials. Teacher training and professional development courses are being developed.<sup>29</sup> Teachers in the classroom are taking initiatives and experimenting with their own approaches and materials.<sup>30</sup> The National Film Board of Canada has even produced two films, *Media and Society* and *Constructing Reality*, with accompanying study guides for media education. Educators are forming associations such as the Canadian Association for Media Education. There is, therefore, an undeniable thrust in the educational community to raise public awareness about the role of the mass media in society and about the public's relationship to the media — about its preferences, expectations, interpretive abilities, and so forth. These efforts are not simply training students in media production (although that is happening also). Rather, to the degree that they succeed, these efforts are fostering critical analysis of the role, influence, and biases of the mass media in modern society. They are encouraging students to question, challenge, and rethink their relationship to the mass media.

Another arena in which the relationship between the public and the mass media is being challenged is the arena of popular literature. The past two decades have witnessed a growing interest in media critique among readers of popular literature. Media critics, such as Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, are becoming familiar public names. Critical media publications, such as Vancouver's own *Adbusters* magazine, are also being introduced for a popular audience. While this trend in popular literature has not yet resulted in any significant revolution of public attitudes, it is contributing to a growing critical

---

<sup>29</sup> One example is the Summer Institute for Media Education recently instituted as a collaborative effort between the Education Faculty and the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University.

<sup>30</sup> This was exactly my situation teaching media studies units in an environmental curriculum at a high school in 1992, and it was one of the reasons that I decided to take up graduate studies in the School of Communication.

awareness of the media in various segments of the population and causing people to rethink their consumer-based relationship to the media.

Yet another arena in which the relationship between the public and the mass media is being challenged is social advocacy. Large numbers of people associated with diverse advocacy groups — feminist, human rights, environment, development, and others — have gained deeply critical perspectives through their experiences with the mass media. As discussed in the introduction, and again in Chapter One, many of these advocacy groups have had to develop specific communication strategies, specialized skills, and resources in an effort to force entry into the exclusive public sphere created by the mass media. Most of these groups, however, have achieved only minimal levels of success, resulting in widespread resentment and frustration. But one result of these experiences has been the alliance of many advocacy movements with efforts to critique and reform both the mass media and the public's relationship with them. In addition, social advocacy groups, such as Media Watch, have sprung up in recent years with the sole purpose of advocating media reform. Thus the mass media have themselves become the subject of social advocacy, drawing various segments of the population into the struggle for reform.

These examples of social advocacy also illustrate another dimension of the public's role in the reform process. The public's role in reform is not limited to merely changing its expressions of consumer choice and influencing press content through market mechanisms. The public can also bring about reform of the press at the policy level by exercising its political will. Policy-level reforms will be discussed further in the following section, but it is important to remind ourselves that public will is the motive force behind policy reform, that incentives and opportunities do exist to mobilize that public will, and that a small but growing number of social advocacy groups are already engaging in that process.

Lest the results of the trends discussed above be exaggerated, however, a word of caution is in order. No one of these trends, in isolation, is yet very impressive. They have been gathering steam only recently and have so far had only a nominal effect on the

operation of the press. But taken together, and in the context of the other fronts discussed above and below, they suggest a set of related opportunities that need to be acknowledged and encouraged within the broad movement for reform.

### **The Political Economy**

As mentioned briefly in the introduction to Chapter Three, an argument can be made that significant press reform is impossible without the prior reform of existing political and economic structures and relationships. This argument is derived from the historical interpretation that the modern political economy serves a dominant class of powerful elites that have a vested interest in maintaining a press that serves as an instrument for the promotion of consumer culture, political passivity, and profit.

For the record, I am in agreement with much of this interpretation. Aspects of the current political and economic system are not only obstacles to press reform, they are obstacles to many movements for social justice and equity in this age. And while the current political economy may have been a historical step forward from its feudalistic predecessor, aspects of it have become anachronistic at the end of the twentieth century, and it should be the object of fundamental reform in its own right.

Where I disagree with the earlier argument, however, is with the assertion that political and economic reform must occur *prior to* — or be a *precondition of* — the struggle toward reform on other fronts. The issue of preconditional reform raises an impossible chicken-and-egg dilemma: If the reform of public discourse depends on the prior reform of the political economy, is it not equally true that reform of the political economy depends on the prior reform of public discourse (and the consciousness raising that this implies)? Which reform, then, must precede the other?

Such chicken-and-egg conceptualizations are far too simplistic, and I question any argument that asserts the necessity of either of these reforms as a *precondition* of the other. Instead, I argue that a much more subtle conceptualization of social change is needed. All

social, political, and economic reforms are intimately connected and interdependent. Surely this is one of the fundamental lessons being driven home by the experiences of the twentieth century. The concept of interdependence has been most clearly articulated in the field of ecology. But its application is not limited to ecology. It applies equally well to the social, political, and economic spheres, as well as to the relationships between each of these spheres — spheres which are themselves little more than artificial distinctions imposed as an aid to communication and analysis.

Thus, as stated earlier, both the need and the possibilities for press reform should be understood in the context of diverse movements for social, political, and economic change that are occurring on many fronts, including political and economic fronts. No one of these fronts is isolated. Progress on one front enhances the mutual possibility for progress on other fronts. They are all interdependent — all part of a complex ecology of social change. Understood in this context, reform on one front cannot be held up as a precondition to reform on another. Rather, it has to be acknowledged that movements for reform on all fronts mutually interact and enable one another.

In this context, I maintain that significant latitude for reform does exist both within the newsroom and within the public, as discussed in the two preceding sections. Every effort on these fronts should thus be encouraged. This can be done, however, while acknowledging the concurrent need for reform in the political and economic arena.

With that said, the press reforms proposed in this paper presuppose that movements for political and economic reform are proceeding simultaneously on other fronts. Such movements, and their prospects, however, are beyond the scope of this thesis. And this is a subject that is being taken up by a wide range of critical scholars and social advocates elsewhere. For the purpose of this thesis it will suffice to comment briefly on two characteristics of the current political economy that relate most directly to the press reforms proposed in this thesis. The first is an assumption that human interactions are necessarily characterized by adversarial relationships and that the political and economic arenas are

therefore naturally characterized by the contest of wills and interests. The second is an assumption that public discourse can and should be commodified and sold for profit like any other manufactured product. The two assumptions are not actually as distinct as they might appear. For instance, the commodification and sale of public discourse in a competitive, unregulated market is essentially an expression of the contest of interests posited by the adversarial conception of human nature. For the purposes of analysis, however, they will, as far as possible, be discussed separately.

*Adversarial relations.* In Canada, as in most modern Western states, the government, the justice system, and the economy all function according to adversarial principles. For instance, the partisan system of electioneering and oppositional debate is an adversarial model of public administration. The advocacy system of criminal prosecution and defense is an adversarial model of justice. And the aggressively competitive capitalist system is an adversarial model of economics.<sup>31</sup> In addition, relations between nation states, between ethnic groups, and between other distinct-identity groups are frequently characterized by the adversarial exercise of power.

So much have these adversarial relationships come to characterize modern life that they are widely assumed to be inevitable expressions of human nature — a perception that is no where better supported than in the pages of the press. Taken to an extreme, however, this assumption leads to a paralyzing contradiction. On the one hand, people yearn for cooperation and reciprocity. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly self-interested and aggressive and therefore incapable of non-adversarial relationships.

---

<sup>31</sup> Each of these models, we need to remind ourselves, are normative models that our societies, or at least the most dominant segments of our societies, have chosen as socially desirable.

In fairness, while the press may be complicit in reinforcing this adversarial conception of human nature, it did not manufacture the conception. The press, like all cultural institutions, operates within a larger cultural context of background assumptions and values. And the adversarial conception of human nature that informs our modern political economy is a large part of that cultural background at this point in history.

Efforts to reform the press into an essentially non-adversarial forum for public consultation are, therefore, ultimately limited by this cultural background that informs so many journalists and editors and influences the preferences, expectations, and behaviours of so many readers. In this respect, the ultimate success of efforts to reform the press into non-adversarial structures and relationships depends on parallel efforts to reform the political economy in a similar manner.

Such reforms, of course, are monumental struggles. Expectations regarding their success will most likely have to adopt a historical perspective measured not by months or years but by generations. But such reforms are not outside of the historically possible. The current form of aggressive and expansionist capitalism may well prove unsustainable, as its requirement for continual growth in the processes of material production and consumption fails to account for ecological limits to these processes. Current partisan political systems may also prove inadequate, as corruptions bred by the adversarial contest of power may ultimately prove incapable of producing the just and equitable social policies that increasingly emancipated populations are demanding. The experience of the past century, marked by a search among growing numbers of people in every nation (and even entire nations) for alternatives to the modern political economy, might well be interpreted as a demonstration of a historical impulse for reform.

Incentives therefore do exist to begin learning non-adversarial modes of interaction. Experiments with such reform are occurring on small and large scales around the planet — from groups of people informally learning non-adversarial communication skills, to organized cooperative movements, to experimentation on national and international scales.

To be sure, radical national political and economic reform in Canada may not be imminent. But small-scale movements and experiments are happening across the country. And, if a historical perspective is maintained, it must be admitted that Canadian history, and the development of Canadian political culture, is anything but a finished process. Political cultures are fluid and evolving, not rigid and static.

*The commodification of public discourse.* As the reader will have noted, the consultative model developed in Chapter Three does not contain explicit economic prescriptions for the operation of the press. This is not an oversight, it is intentional. The consultative model calls the press into the service of civil society, not into the service of any particular economic doctrines or formulas. Any economic arrangements that could potentially support the model should be experimented with — and there is no reason to assume that there is only one *correct* economic formula. There may well be several arrangements that could work, and these may well vary according to changing social and economic conditions.

Currently, the Canadian press operates on the capitalist assumption that public discourse can and should be commodified and sold for profit like any other manufactured product. This assumption may or may not prove workable as the basis for a consultative public forum. But given that the current operation of the press is based on a capitalist model and that this is unlikely to change radically in the near future, experimentation with press reform in Canada will, at least initially, have to proceed from this point.<sup>32</sup> Efforts to

---

<sup>32</sup> While the following discussion focuses primarily on reform within a commercial context, other economic arrangements certainly warrant exploration. As Keane (1991) argues: "There is nothing 'natural' or 'necessary' about profit-seeking, privately owned and controlled communications media" (p. 153). For instance, the creation of an arms length "crown corporation" type of press, with a very clear mandate and operational principles, might be experimented with on various levels of government. It could solve many of the problems associated with ownership, advertisement, and the commodification of public discourse discussed below. On the other hand, as the experience of the CBC has demonstrated, the difficult issue of funding would need to be addressed, as would issues of government interference and control. But it is not inconceivable that a public-service, non-profit press could be set up initially through publicly subsidized capital investment, and then finance its future operating expenses through subscription and newsstand revenues. In

apply the model within a profit-oriented system, however, will have to take into account the inherent constraints of the system (as they would have to with any economic system).

While an exhaustive economic analysis is again beyond the scope of this thesis, two of these constraints are flagged below.

The history of the twentieth century has demonstrated that the commercial press has a natural tendency toward concentrated, near-monopoly ownership in an unregulated market. Such concentration places potential control of public discourse in the hands of an extremely small group of individuals who were never elected by the public to represent public interests. This concentrated ownership of the press, moreover, is *interlocked* with concentrated ownership of other non-media industries. The small group of individuals sitting on the board of directors of major national newspaper and newsmagazine chains are also sitting on the board of directors of other major corporate and industrial interests (Clement, 1975; Winter, 1988)

Although it would take further research to determine if such control is consciously exercised by these media owners and boards of directors, it can be assumed with a fair amount of confidence that media owners and their boards do staff senior management positions with people who share their commercial and ideological orientations and that these orientations are very likely carried, however subtly, into the organizational culture of the press. Furthermore, what can be stated with even more confidence is that historically these owners and their boards *have shown little vision and exercised little corporate leadership in ensuring that the press serves as a forum for an inclusive, participatory, and functional civil society*. Whether this is a result of commission or omission can be debated, but efforts to

---

the long run, such a public-service press may well be the most desirable arrangement, in terms of the public interest. In the short term, however, the prospects are remote, and initial experimentation will have to proceed within the commercial press. Perhaps definite limitations will become evident in the process, and the alternative of a public-service press will then become more appealing.



reform the press within a capitalist economy will undoubtedly need to arouse the economic interests, and imaginations, of these media owners. Part of this is the public's responsibility — a function of consumer preferences and expectations, as discussed above. Part of this responsibility may also belong to the academic community, as will be discussed below. But part of the responsibility certainly also belongs to policy makers and regulators.

Current economic policies have largely created the commercial press as it operates today. Alternative policies could very well assist in reforming it. Incentives that make the consultative model more profitable may have to be implemented if it is to catch on in a capitalist economy. For instance, why not develop operational criteria for a consultative press, view those that operate according to such criteria as *essential public services*, and eliminate tax burdens on them? Or even subsidize them? Identifying such operational criteria would be difficult but not impossible. And tax-free or subsidized public-service status could be a powerful incentive for experimentation with alternatives in the operation of the press.

Aside from such economic incentives, regulations could also be introduced. For instance, minimal *public content* requirements could be regulated in the same manner that *Canadian content* is now regulated in much of the mass media (besides, what could be more Canadian than the diverse voices and perspectives of the Canadian public being expressed in a forum intended for that purpose?). Regulations that limit or prohibit ownership interlocks with non-media interests could also be imposed (as they are in the banking industry) in order to reduce the possibility of direct conflict between commercial and public interests.

These are not entirely radical or unrealistic proposals. Monopolies and near-monopolies have almost always been regulated in Canada, as well as in most parts of the Western world, in the name of public interest. The press is actually a historical exception, and perhaps its time should be up. The underlying point of these suggestions, however, is

not to prescribe specific policy measures but to suggest the possibility that creative policy alternatives are possible and that they should be explored.

The second major constraint of the commercial press is the logic of advertising revenues and audience maximization discussed in Chapter One. The potential conflict created by this logic — between the interests of the public versus the interests of advertisers — is difficult for the commercial press to reconcile. For instance, it can be argued that the public would benefit from a sustained, critical examination of consumer culture and economic expansionism, including focused consultation regarding possible lifestyle alternatives and economic reforms. Such critique and consultation, however, is not in the immediate self-interest of a large segment of the commercial sector, whose profits depend on the promotion of consumer culture and economic expansion. Thus, even though most newsrooms exercise care in separating their advertising decisions from their editorial decisions, it can be argued that a newspaper or newsmagazine will not knowingly alienate a large segment of its advertising clientele by facilitating a sustained critique of consumerism and economic expansionism.

But this argument has its limitations. The commercial press does, on occasion, critique the underlying assumptions of consumer culture — and it seems increasingly willing to do so as popular environmental awareness increases and readership expectations change. The press also challenges its own sources of advertising revenue *on occasion*. A glance through many metropolitan dailies will reveal occasional stories exposing corporate fraud and industrial corruption. The view of the media held by many business elites — as a generally left-leaning institution aligned against the corporate world — would also seem to suggest at least a grain of truth to the media's willingness to challenge big business.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Conrad Black's *A view of the press* (1981) for an example of one such viewpoint.

It should also be acknowledged that advertising is not limited to the promotion of consumer-industrial products. The arts, service, and information sectors are all sources of advertising revenue, as are government agencies and, increasingly, even public interest groups. Non-commercial advertising bases could therefore also be more aggressively pursued.

Advertising, it should not be forgotten, is also not the only source of revenue for the commercial press. Subscriptions and newsstand sales are also significant sources of income — and to the degree that they can replace advertising revenue, they could alleviate much of the conflict of interest described above (it could also reduce the enormous amount of paper that is consumed by advertising). Other creative approaches to decreasing reliance on advertising revenue could also be explored, such as bringing down production and distribution costs. For instance, current trends in publishing technology, combined with increasingly feasible customer service options, could permit the production and distribution of smaller, partially customizable newspapers, with subscribers ordering only those sections that they actually read and paying appropriately. But the purpose of this discussion, again, is not to prescribe a specific revenue formula for the commercial press. Rather, it is to suggest that alternative revenue arrangements are available even within a commercial operation. But they must be pursued purposefully and creatively.

Many practical economic issues will need to be solved if the commercial press is to be significantly reformed. They will not, however, be solved from an armchair. Practical experimentation, trial and error, and commitment will be necessary within the press, the public, and within the policy arena. And while incentives within the press and public have already been discussed, it is worth noting briefly a few of the incentives that exist among policy makers.

The press, as it currently operates, does not serve the policy process well. As discussed in Chapter Three, it is not only the public that lacks opportunity through the press to consult and inform those upon whom it has conferred decision-making authority. Those

who have been invested with authority also find it extremely difficult to consult with or inform the public. The press does not facilitate these processes well. Policy makers are well aware that their public communications will be filtered through the press and received by the public in a highly fragmented, simplified, decontextualized, and often inflammatory manner. They are also aware that even the most enlightened policies and programs that they propose are easily undermined by powerful and highly organized interest groups that mount successful media campaigns, dominate public discourse with opposition, and preempt or drown out less organized but more widespread expressions of popular will and support. Yet in our current political system even the most sincere and progressive policy makers are hamstrung unless expressions of popular support and political will prevail.

A communications environment such as that just described has a significant impact on the ability of elected representatives to do the work for which they were elected, as well as on the level of trust, confidence, respect, and support that they receive from the public. Incentive therefore does potentially exist for policy makers themselves to push for press reform in the interests of creating a more functional communications environment that supports rather than interferes with the formulation of policies designed in the public's interest.

### **The Academy**

Academics also have a significant role to play in the movement toward press reform. In examining this role, it is necessary to consider the focus of media theory and research as well as the relationship between academics and the press, the public, and policy makers.

On the level of theory and research, there is little doubt that the conceptual models that scholars employ in their work influence their perceptions of the phenomena they are researching. Simply put, conceptual categories foreground some aspects of reality and obscure others. Furthermore, the selection or formulation of conceptual models is not a

neutral, objective process. It inevitably reflects the subjective biases — the assumptions, experiences, interests, and values — of the researcher (and/or the financial sponsor of the research). These biases, moreover, are not simply personal. Often they become collective biases, and they can influence the entire research agenda of an academic community.<sup>34</sup> For instance, medical research in most of the twentieth century has been heavily influenced by a reductionist, control-oriented medical model that focuses on cures rather than prevention, and foregrounds pharmaceutical and surgical interventions while obscuring nutritional, herbal, and other forms of health maintenance and healing.

Given the manner in which subjective biases influence our conceptual models and our models influence our perception (and construction) of the social world, academics have a responsibility to examine the biases underlying their conceptual models, to make them explicit, reflect on them, and engage in dialogue over them. Our conceptual models will never be free from bias, but we can become conscious of our biases and purposefully modify our conceptual models when necessary.

I suggest that such a self-reflexive process would be timely in the field of media studies, where organizational, ideological, and political-economic models have tended to overshadow what could be called *citizens* models, or what Rosen (1991) calls *public* models, of the media: models that examine specifically how citizens and civil society want or need the media to function, and evaluate the media from civil-needs-based criteria. Granted, as discussed in Chapter Two, some media scholars have ventured into this territory. But in my experience their work is dwarfed by the magnitude of work that has been carried out within the other conceptual frameworks mentioned.

I submit that conceptual models based on the needs and aspirations of citizens provide a much needed lens for looking at the media today. Organizational, ideological,

---

<sup>34</sup> See Thomas Kuhn's work on scientific paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) for a classic discussion of this topic.

and political-economic models have certainly provided many valuable insights into the operation of the media, and it will be necessary to draw on these insights if the media is to be reformed. But the limitation of many of these models is that they primarily foreground the problems existing within the media today rather than foregrounding our needs of the media tomorrow. They therefore have not provided a vision of reform that can capture the imagination of the press, the public, and policy makers.

One of the primary purposes of this thesis has been to contribute toward the articulation of such a vision. Once we have a broad vision of media reform, conceptual models can be developed and refined, and in turn become powerful conceptual tools for reform. Such models would allow critical media scholars to move beyond what McQuail (1994) has described as our tendency to pass judgement on the media, “rather than formulate or clarify the standards of judgement” (p. 236). They would begin to provide specific civil-needs-based criteria with which to analyze and evaluate current media performance.

Beginning with a baseline evaluation of the press as it operates today, ongoing analysis and evaluation through such a lens could be a great assistance in guiding press reform through successive stages of approximation and refinement toward a socially desired end. The insights gained through such analysis and evaluation would provide an informed perspective from which academics could engage the press, the public, and policy makers in dialogue and education about media reform.

For instance, media scholars have the opportunity to engage journalists during their initial training in journalism schools, as well as at mid-career stages through books, professional development conferences, and workshops. Journalism courses offer an excellent venue to examine the normative assumptions and biases of the prevailing model of journalism, present alternatives, and get the next generation of journalists thinking in new ways about the function of journalism in society. Such opportunities need to be pursued if incoming journalists are to contribute to media reform. But this process will in part depend

on academics themselves having formulated new models of journalism with value to the public, as discussed above. Similarly, mid-career professional development conferences and workshops, such as the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Journalists, need to be utilized in the same manner in order to engage practicing journalists with the issues and even draw their attention to personal and collective incentives for reform. These conferences and workshops will need to move beyond presenting reform issues in the abstract (as this thesis largely has). They will have to address specific, individual practices and patterns of behaviour in the profession and provide hands-on opportunities to learn new practices and patterns, such as developing reporting skills that foster the resolution — as opposed to the inflammation — of conflicts. Such workshops, moreover, will have to address not just the journalist on the beat, but every level of hierarchy within the press. Reform of the press cannot occur without reform of individual behaviours within it.

On the public front, academics have an unprecedented opportunity to capitalize on the recent trend in media education as a means of engaging secondary and post-secondary students and teachers in media reform issues. Media education curricula provide an excellent venue for engaging young up-and-coming citizens in the critical examination of their own preferences and expectations of the media. They also provide an opportunity to introduce alternative perspectives on how the media could better serve them as citizens, as well as raise awareness of how they can affect change in the operation of media. Media education curricula also provide a venue for developing the kind of civic competence that such media reform will ultimately require from citizens. This includes the ability to stay abreast of relevant public issues and to consider diverse perspectives on those issues. It also includes the ability to articulate personal (or shared) perspectives in concise, written form, and to submit them to the press for consideration by others.

Academics also have an opportunity to engage the public through the publication of these same issues in the popular press, in language that is accessible to the lay person, that suggests popular incentives for reform, and that suggests concrete opportunities to affect

reform. Another opportunity exists within the growing networks of public interest groups and social advocacy movements that contain individuals who are eager to develop media relations skills and are increasingly recognizing the media themselves as the subject of social advocacy. Many of these groups are already expressing interest in the insights offered by academics on media reform.

Finally, academics also have an opportunity to engage directly with policy makers in a dialogue on press reform. Academics can assume leadership in presenting a case for reform, articulating a vision of reform, and translating that vision into practical ideas and policy options. They can also prepare themselves to insert their vision, their ideas, and their proposed policy options into public debate during those crucial moments when political circumstance and public will align to create favorable conditions for reform. According to Tom Kent (1994), chair of the 1980 Royal Commission on Newspapers, it was this very lack of vision and available policy options that was the primary reason reform did not emerge out of the newspaper concentration “crisis” of 1980. By the time the Royal Commission had been appointed, undertaken its study, drafted its recommendations, and seen its recommendations drafted into a legislative proposal, the political will for reform had dissipated — the moment was lost. Kent’s advice:

The time will probably come again when policy to revitalize newspapers is again a feasible item of the government agenda. . . . It will not do to start the thinking then.

That is the most important working conclusion from our experience. The necessary motto for reformers, in this as in other matters. . . be prepared — for the day when some conjunction of circumstances creates a will for change; that day belongs to those who have practical ideas ready. (p. 39)

On all of these fronts, academics have an opportunity to contribute to media reform. But to do so in a meaningful manner, I suggest that we first have to be confident that our conceptual models will lead us to the type of reforms our society wants and needs.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis admittedly swims against a strong tide of cynicism in the 1990s. Many of the humanitarian hopes and aspirations that were widely held at the beginning of this century have been eroded — and often abandoned entirely — through experiences of war, through painfully slow progress in the field of human rights, through recurrent expressions of intolerance and fanaticism, through ongoing scenes of human tragedy and suffering, through failed social experiments, and through myriad social, economic, and environmental crises plaguing the planet. As the century draws to a close, it thus appears to many that humanity is in a more sorry state now than it was at the start of the century.

I believe, however, that such a perspective is limited. It does not acknowledge, for instance, that these troublesome issues have been with us for millennia, yet our collective awareness of them, and reflection on them, has substantially increased in recent history. We are better positioned now than at any point in history to begin consciously and purposefully addressing them. This has occurred, moreover, in part because of developments in our media of mass communication.

It is ironic then that these same developments in mass communication are also largely responsible for our cynicism. Our mass media have enabled us to see ourselves collectively for the first time, but the image we see is not what we might have hoped for, and it has thus become a source of cynicism and disillusionment. In our cynicism, moreover, we in turn despair of trying to reform the mass media into an instrument for social change. Therefore the mass media often serve as little more than a social looking glass, however distorted the image.

If we want to consciously bring about social change I submit that we need, among other things, to reconceptualize the role of the mass media in society. Yes, the mass media may serve as a (somewhat distorted) looking glass. Yes, the mass media may even serve as a (somewhat exclusive) market place of ideas. But it can potentially serve as much

more. *And we need to begin to conceptualize it as something more.* We need a new metaphor. And the metaphor I am proposing in this thesis is the consultative public forum.

Of course, I am not implying that the objectives associated with the consultative forum are the only social functions the mass media should serve. The looking glass itself may remain a valuable function. Cultivation of the arts, provision of entertainment, and facilitation of other cultural modes of expressions are also extremely valuable functions. But I am suggesting that with a conscious effort we can add to these functions in order to meet social needs and aspirations that are currently unfulfilled.

Community development, collective decision-making, and conflict resolution, as defined in this thesis, are all social objectives that the mass media can contribute to, and I submit that these objectives *do* represent very real and widely shared contemporary needs and aspirations. Likewise the provision of complexity, subtlety, and context; the inclusion and accurate representation of diverse perspectives; the fostering of a moderate tone of expression within an atmosphere of suspended judgement; and the construction of public discourse around reference to ethical principle — these are all communicative principles that represent very real contemporary needs and aspirations, and can be fostered within the media.

The degree to which the mass media begin to operate according to the objectives and principles outlined in this thesis is, I suggest, the degree that we will begin to engage the media in valuable public functions that are long overdue. Of course, the model proposed in this thesis is only one way to envision media reforms, and it has focused primarily on only one component of the mass media. Ultimately we need to engage in the widest possible dialogue and reflection in order to arrive at a shared vision of how the press, as well as other mass media, could function. From such a vision, general strategies for reform can be devised and translated into specific lines of actions, and criteria can be formulated for ongoing evaluation, approximation, and refinement. But to do so, we need to first overcome cynicism regarding our capacity for conscious social change.

As discussed in Chapter Four, I submit that the long-term prospects for press reform are reasonably good. Incentives exist, and movement can already be discerned on several fronts. Certainly, we need to have realistic expectations about the pace of change, and we need to situate our efforts within the context of broader movements for social change that are proceeding on other fronts. We also need to organize our efforts, and be deliberate, systematic, and persistent. But change is an attainable and worthwhile goal. To assume otherwise is disempowering and self-defeating. Change, moreover, begins in our own respective spheres of action, be they the press, the public, the political economy, or the academy.

## REFERENCES

- Altschull, H. (1984). *Agents of power: The role of the news media in human affairs*. New York: Longman.
- Altschull, H. (1990). *From Milton to McLuhan: The ideas behind American journalism*. New York: Longman.
- Anderson, A. (1993). Source-media relations: The production of the environmental agenda. In A. Hansen (Ed.), *The mass media and environmental issues*, (pp. 51-80). London: Leicester University Press.
- Anderson, R., Dardenne, R., & Killenberg, G. (1994). *The conversation of journalism*. London: Praeger.
- Austin, L. (1994). *Public journalism: A progress report*. New York: Project on Public Life and the Press.
- Bateson, G. (1972). A theory of play and fantasy. In G. Bateson (Ed.), *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*, (pp. 177-193). San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co.
- Bayley, E. (1981). *Joseph McCarthy and the press*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Black, C. (1981). A view of the press. In B. Zwicker & D. MacDonald (Eds.), *The news inside the Canadian media*, (pp. 241-253). Ottawa: Deneau Publishers.
- Boorstin, D. (1980). *The image: A guide to pseudo-events*. New York: Atheneum.
- Canada. Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. (1951). *Report*. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier.
- Canada. Royal Commission on Newspapers. (1981). *Report*. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.
- Canada. Royal Commission on Publications. (1961). *Report*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- Canada. Special Senate Committee on Mass Media. (1970). *Report: The uncertain mirror*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada.
- Cassidy, S. (1992). The environment and the media: Two strategies for challenging hegemony. In J. Wasko & V. Mosco (Eds.), *Democratic communications in the information age*, (pp. 159-174). Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Chapin, H., & Stirling, A. (1977). *Who calls the tune? Using the media to promote social change*. Ottawa: The Canadian Council on Social Development.
- Charity, A. J., & Austin, L. (1994). *Doing public journalism: A newsroom guide*. New York: Project on Public Life and the Press.
- Christians, C. G., Ferré, J. P., & Fackler, P. M. (1993). *Good news: Social ethics and the press*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Clement, W. (1975). *The Canadian corporate elite: An analysis of economic power*. Ottawa: McClelland and Stewart.
- Commission on the Freedom of the Press. (1947). *A free and responsible press*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Curran, J. (1986). The different approaches to media reform. In J. Curran, J. Ecclestone, G. Oakley, & A. Richardson (Eds.), *Bending reality: The state of the media*, (pp. 89-135). London: Pluto Press.
- Curran, J. (1991). Rethinking the media as a public sphere. In P. Dahlgren & C. Sparks (Eds.), *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere in the new media age*, (pp. 27-57). London: Routledge.
- Dahlgren, P., & Sparks, C. (Eds.). (1991). *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere in the new media age*. London: Routledge.
- Daley, P., & O'Neill, D. (1991). "Sad is too mild a word": Press coverage of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 42-57.
- Davey, K. (1981). Keith Davey replies. In B. Zwicker & D. MacDonald (Eds.), *The news inside the Canadian media*, (pp. 230-236). Ottawa: Deneau Publishers.
- Desbarats, P. (1981). Truth in journalism: A yawning matter? In B. Zwicker & D. MacDonald (Eds.), *The news inside the Canadian media*, (pp. 7-14). Ottawa: Deneau Publishers.
- Desbarats, P. (1990). *Guide to Canadian news media*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Downs, A. (1972). Up and down with ecology — The issue attention cycle. *Public Interest*, 28, 38-50.
- Dumbald, E. (1957). *The Bill of Rights and what it means today*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Dunnett, P. (1988). *The world newspaper industry*. London: Croom Helm.
- Dunwoody, S., & Griffin, R. J. (1993). Journalistic strategies for reporting long-term environmental issues: A case study of three Superfund sites. In A. Hansen (Ed.), *The mass media and environmental issues*, (pp. 22-50). London: Leicester University Press.
- Einsiedel, E., & Coughlan, E. (1993). The Canadian press and the environment: reconstructing a social reality. In A. Hansen (Ed.), *The mass media and environmental issues*, (pp. 134-149). London: Leicester University Press.
- Enzensberger, H. M. (1970). Constituents of a theory of the media. *New Left Review*, 64, 13-36.
- Ericson, R., Baranek, P., & Chan, J. (1987). *Visualizing deviance: A study of news organization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Ericson, R., Baranek, P., & Chan, J. (1989). *Negotiating control: A study of news sources*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Gandy, O. (1980). Information in health: Subsidized news? *Media, Culture and Society*, 2(2), 103-115.
- Gandy, O. (1982). *Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Gandy, O. (1992). Public relations and public policy: The structuration of dominance in the information age. In E. Toth & R. Heath (Eds.), *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations*, (pp. 131-164). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage.
- Gerbner, G. (1990). Advancing on the path to righteousness, maybe. In N. Signorielli & M. Morgan (Eds.), *Cultivation analysis: New directions in research*, (pp. 249-262). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 173-199.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). Aging with television: Images on television drama and conceptions of social reality. *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 37-47.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. In Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith (Eds.), . New York: International Publishers.
- Greenberg, M. R., Sachsman, D. B., Sandman, P. M., & Salome, K. L. (1989). Network evening news coverage of environmental risk. *Risk Analysis*, 9(1), 119-26.
- Gross, L. (1984). The cultivation of intolerance: Television, blacks, and gays. In G. Melischek, K. E. Rosengren, & J. Strappers (Eds.), *Cultural indicators: An international symposium*, (pp. 345-363). Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Habermas, J. (1974). The public sphere. *New German Critique*, 3, 45-55.
- Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of communicative action* (Thomas McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1994). *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Original published in German, 1962), Trans.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

- Hackett, R. A. (1991). *News and dissent: The press and the politics of peace in Canada*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Hall, S. (1986). Media power and class power. In J. Curran, J. Ecclestone, G. Oakley, & A. Richardson (Eds.), *Bending reality: The state of the media*, . London: Pluto Press.
- Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. London: Macmillan.
- Hansen, A. (1991). The media and the social construction of the environment. *Media, Culture and Society*, 13(4), 443-57.
- Hartley, J. (1982). *Understanding news*. London and New York: Methuen.
- Hartley, J. (1994). Hegemony. In T. O'Sullivan, J. Hartley, D. Saunders, M. Montgomery, & J. Fiske (Eds.), *Key concepts in communication and cultural studies*, (2nd ed., pp. 133-135). London and New York: Routledge.
- Keane, J. (1991). *The media and democracy*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Kent, T. (1994). The times and significance of the Kent Commission. In H. Holmes & D. Taras (Eds.), *Seeing ourselves: Media power and policy*, (pp. 21-39). Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- Kessler, L. (1984). *The dissident press: Alternative journalism in American history*. London: Sage.
- Kesterton, W. H. (1967). *A history of journalism in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lenin, V. I. (1927). *Collected works*. New York: International Publishers.
- Lichtenberg, J. (Ed.). (1990). *Democracy and the mass media*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipscomb, A. A. (Ed.). (1904). *The writings of Thomas Jefferson*. (Vol. 11). Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association.
- Lorimer, R., & McNulty, J. (1991). *Mass communication in Canada*. Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart Inc.
- MacBride, S. (1980). *Many voices one world: Towards a new more just and efficient world information and communication order*. New York: UNESCO.
- McQuail, D. (1983). *Mass communication theory*. London: Sage.
- McQuail, D. (1992). *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*. London: Sage.

- McQuail, D. (1994). Mass communication and the public interest: Towards social theory for media structure and performance. In D. Crowley & D. Mitchell (Eds.), *Communication theory today*, (pp. 235-253). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Meadows, D. H. (1991). Changing the world through the informationsphere. In C. L. LaMay & E. E. Dennis (Eds.), *Media and the environment*, (pp. 67-79). Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Meyer, P. (1991). *The new precision journalism*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1956). *On Liberty (originally published in 1859)*. New York: The Liberal Arts Press.
- Milton, J. (1974). *Areopagitica (originally published in 1644)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, M. (1982). Television and adolescents' sex-role stereotypes: A longitudinal study. *Journal of personal and social psychology*, 43(5), 947-955.
- Morgan, M., & Gross, L. (1980). Television viewing and reading: Does more equal better? *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 159-165.
- Morris, W. (Ed.). (1969). *The American heritage dictionary of the English language*. Boston: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc.
- Nohrstedt, S. A. (1991). The information crisis in Sweden after Chernobyl. *Media, Culture and Society*, 13(4), 477-97.
- Nordenstreng, K., & Hannikainen, L. (1984). *The mass media declaration of UNESCO*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.
- Osler, A. M. (1993). *News: The evolution of journalism in Canada*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd.
- Picard, R. G. (1985). *The press and the decline of democracy: The democratic socialist response in public policy*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Robbins, B. (Ed.). (1993). *The phantom public sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rosen, J. (1991). Making journalism more public. *Communication*, 12, 267-284.
- Rosen, J. (1994, ). *Public journalism as a democratic art*. Paper presented at the the Project on Public Life's fall seminar on public journalism, at the American Press Institute, November 11, 1994, Reston, Virginia.
- Rosen, J., & Merritt, D. J. (1994). *Public Journalism: Theory and practice*. Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation.
- Rothschild, N., & Morgan, M. (1987). Cohesion and control: Relationships with parents as mediators of television. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 7(3), 299-314.



- Schlesinger, P. (1990). Rethinking the sociology of journalism: Source strategies and the limits of media-centrism. In M. Ferguson (Ed.), *Public communication: The new imperatives*, (pp. 61-83). London: Sage.
- Segal, L. (1973). *Reporters and officials*. Lexington: DC Health.
- Shanahan, J. (1993). Television and the cultivation of environmental concern: 1988-92. In A. Hansen (Ed.), *The mass media and environmental issues*, (pp. 181-197). London: Leicester University Press.
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Singer, E., & Endreny, P. (1987). Reporting hazards: Their benefits and costs. *Journal of Communications*, 37(3), 10-26.
- Smith, A. (1910). *An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (originally published in 1776). (Vol. 2). London: J.M. Dent.
- Smythe, D. W. (1981). *Dependency road: Communications, capitalism, consciousness and Canada*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Sparks, C. (1986). The media and the state. In J. Curran, J. Ecclestone, G. Oakley, & A. Richardson (Eds.), *Bending reality: The state of the media*, (pp. 76-86). London: Pluto Press.
- Squires, J. (1993). Introduction. In J. Squires (Ed.), *Principled positions: Postmodernism and the rediscovery of value*, (pp. 1-13). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Stephens, M. (1988). *A history of news: From the drum to the satellite*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Stocking, H., & Leonard, J. P. (1990). The greening of the press. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 29(N/D), 37-44.
- Study Circles Resource Centre. (1993). *The study circle handbook: A manual for study circle discussion leaders, organizers, and participants*. Pomfret, CT: Topsfield Foundation.
- Tankard, J. W. J., Hendrickson, L., Silberman, J., Bliss, K., & Ghanem, S. (1991, August). *Media frames: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement*. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual meeting, Boston.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Turow, J. (1989). Public relations and newswork: A neglected relationship. *The American Behavioural Scientist*, 33(N/D), 206-212.
- Wasko, J., & Mosco, V. (Eds.). (1992). *Democratic communications in the information age*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Williams, R. (1966). *Communications*. London: Chatto and Windus.

- Winter, J. P. (1988). Interlocking directorships and economic power. In R. Picard, J. Winter, M. McCombs, & S. Lacy (Eds.), *Press concentration and monopoly: New perspectives on newspaper ownership and operation*, (pp. 105-125). New Jersey: Ablex.
- Yankelovitch, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgement: Making democracy work in a complex world*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.