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THE MEDIA,
JOURNALISM AND
DEMOCRACY

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The Media, Journalism and Democracy

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Series Preface

The International Library of Politics and Comparative Government brings together in one series the most significant journal articles to appear in the field of comparative politics in the last twenty-five years or so. The aim is to render readily accessible to teachers, researchers and students an extensive range of essays which, together, provide an indispensable basis for understanding both the established conceptual terrain and the new ground being broken in the fast changing field of comparative political analysis.

The series is divided into three major sections: *Institutional Studies*, *Thematic Studies* and *Country Studies*. The *Institutional* volumes focus on the comparative investigation of the basic processes and components of the modern pluralist polity, including electoral behaviour, parties and party systems, interest groups, constitutions, legislatures and executives. There are also collections dealing with such major international actors as the European Union and United Nations.

The *Thematic* volumes address those contemporary problems, processes and issues which have assumed a particular salience for politics and policy-making in the late twentieth century. Such themes include: democratization, revolution and political change, 'New Politics', nationalism, terrorism, the military, the media, human rights, consociationalism and the challenges to mainstream party political ideologies.

The *Country* volumes are particularly innovative in applying a comparative perspective to a consideration of the political science tradition in individual states, both large and small. The distinctive features of the national literature are highlighted and the wider significance of developments is evaluated.

A number of acknowledged experts have been invited to act as editors for the series; they preface each volume with an introductory essay in which they review the basis for the selection of articles, and suggest future directions of research and investigation in the subject area.

The series is an invaluable resource for all those working in the field of comparative government and politics.

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Introduction

Media and Democracy: Democracy and the Media

A key purpose of this Introduction is to build bridges across the gulf between media and political theory. Media scholarship, premised on the obviousness of its self-importance, seems a smaller part of the picture from the perspective of democratic theory. By contrast, it is extraordinary how little serious attention political science pays to media. Despite outstanding contributions from individuals, not least Harold Lasswell, the founding father of propaganda analysis (1927), political science as a discipline continues to behave overwhelmingly as though the sole legitimate inquiry is of quantifiable media influence on electoral outcomes. A case in point here is Goodin and Klingemann's otherwise excellent *A New Handbook of Political Science* (1996), whose only references to the media are set in the limited context of agenda-setting and voting behaviour. The inextricable entwining of modern politics and media (Swanson and Mancini, 1996), amid the ever-increasing economic power of the communications industry, is indeed abundantly obvious to everyone, it seems, except professional political scientists.

We have split our Introduction to this volume into two parts. The first part introduces the reader to the literature within the context of the principal media debates over the last 30 years and outlines the essays selected for this volume. The second part we title 'Democracy and the Media'. It sets out a typology of the main twentieth-century theories of democracy and appraises how they assist our understanding of the democratic requirements of media. This may be more difficult for students with no formal background in political theory. However, political theory is crucial for the understanding of media's democratic role. The media literature sometimes acknowledges the media/political theory gap and occasionally admits the lack of a coherent philosophy of democracy as a weakness. However, there is still a long way to go from acknowledging the gap to filling it. We must have a clear idea of democratic standards and goals before we can even begin to ask the right questions of media performance. Ultimately judgements must turn on notions of what democracy actually is, and what it could and should be.

The Media and Democracy

Margaret Scammell and Holli Semetko

There are two immediately striking features of the vast bulk of media and democracy research. First, the central importance of media for democracy is taken for granted – it is virtually axiomatic. A free and vigorous press is both a symbol and guarantor of democracy; by contrast, increased control of the media and the muzzling of journalists accompany the coming to power of authoritarian regimes, as surely as night follows day. The converse, the emergence of a free and critical press is a key indicator of the transformation to democracy. This much is beyond dispute.

Second, the model of democracy which media are supposed to serve is also largely taken for granted. In theory there are a variety of models of democracy to choose from, yet one – the classic liberal model – predominates above all and provides the premises and touchstone for virtually all avenues of inquiry. It is curious that classic liberalism, developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, should dominate so much thinking about modern media. After all, political theory has largely discarded it as a hopelessly outdated way of accurately describing modern democratic society. Twentieth-century thinkers, pluralists, socialists and elite theorists, in all their diverse forms, present powerful critiques of the continuing relevance of the classic model, either as adequate description of what exists or as the ideal to be pursued, or sometimes both.

How, then, can we explain the continuing persistence of classic liberalism in modern media inquiry? At first it does seem strange, but only at first. We get some clues, if we turn around the ‘media and democracy’ question and ask what democratic theory says about media. The results are surprising.

Liberal philosophy fought for the great founding principles that continue to underpin the democratic importance of media: freedom of speech, the autonomy of civil society from the state, the sovereignty of the people. Victory was seemingly won when the newly emerging liberal democracies of the Western world enshrined these principles, either by law or by fact, in their constitutions over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The decisive philosophical debates concerning the liberty of the press took place then. The classic arguments in favour of press freedom, as a bulwark against despotism and for the attainment of truth through unrestricted public discussion (Mill, 1991/1859) became the established wisdom. So vital to liberty was the press that Thomas Jefferson declared: ‘... were it left to me to decide whether we should have government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter’ (Lipscomb and Berg, 1903: 57–58). Neither before nor since has the press been placed so prominently at the centre of democratic thought. When students of media and democracy seek a theoretical basis to launch their inquiries, they continue to find profit in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates on freedom of speech and the press (Keane, 1991: 1–50).

By contrast, the great works of twentieth-century democratic theory rarely focus on the mass media. The investigator is forced to tease out inferences from passages whose central questions lie elsewhere. The media emerge, if at all, as formless carriers of abstractions and general principles: all too often they are taken for granted, their institutions and processes left unexplored. This leaves us with a certain symmetry of taken-for-grantedness. Democratic theory takes for granted an oversimple and outdated model of the media, while media studies take for granted an outdated model of democracy.

There are important consequences for the way in which media are studied. Most inquiries, whether critical or supportive, stem from the basic liberal principles of democracy and rarely question the premises. The literature is concentrated around investigation of media’s adequate or inadequate performance of duties in relation to the classic liberal assumptions of democracy. The key assumptions are:

1. A free media is a manifestation of the principle of freedom of speech; this is intrinsically a good thing, both as defence against despotism and for the achievement of ‘truth’ through unrestricted discussion.

2. A free press is required for protection of the autonomy of civil society from the potentially despotic incursions of the state.
3. A free press is necessary, via the representative principle, to provide information and enable free debate so that the public can form opinions and make choices among competitors for their votes.

The media's duties to democracy flow clearly and logically from these premises:

1. most important, to act as a watchdog against the state;
2. to supply accurate and sufficient information;
3. to represent the people in the sense of adequately reflecting the spectrum of public opinion and political competition.

Do media perform these tasks adequately? If not, why not? These are the questions that dominate media investigation. Thus we see media inquiry clustered around these three questions:

- *Media and the state.* What in reality is the relationship – that of watchdog or lapdog? How is the 'watchdog' ideal enhanced or deformed by state interference and regulation of media ownership and content, by censorship, by the growth of state public relations, and so on?
- *Information.* What kind of information do the media serve us? What is news? How is it selected, constructed, biased and so on?
- *Representation.* Are the media truly representative of society? Which people and groups are super-served and which neglected in media representations of public opinion? Why?

The prominence of these questions, especially the first two, is reflected in the organization and selection of essays for this book. Reflected also is the near-consensus that the media frequently, and for some authors, generally, fall short of their democratic tasks. Yet, whether critical or broadly content with media performance, the literature overwhelmingly accepts the classical liberal paradigm. Even the most vociferous critics, such as Herman and Chomsky (1988) with their propaganda model of modern media or Douglas Kellner (1990) with his critique of the structural corporate bias of media, rarely confront the liberal premises.

Conversely, the critics and enemies of liberal democracy itself – most influentially the Marxist schools of thought – offer almost the exact opposite of the predominant approach to media criticism. For Marxists, it is the premises of liberal democracy that are suspect, while the media performs well its real task which, far from being a watchdog, is actually to assist the status quo and the maintenance of class rule. The Bolshevik dismissal of 'bourgeois rights', such as voting and freedom of speech, is rendered more subtle in modern Marxist thinking. Yet the idea persists that the media operate effectively to maintain the hegemony of the ruling capitalist class (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973; Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971; Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Hall *et al.*, 1978; Marcuse, 1964).

Stated so baldly, the predominant and the Marxist ways of thinking appear as opposite extremes. In practice, there has been cross-fertilization of ideas which has influenced new debates about the media. The main point here is to highlight some consequences of the continuing dominance of the liberal paradigm in media and democracy research. One, picked up

by writers examining the transformations in the former Soviet bloc, is that there is no theory of media and democracy as such. Eastern European scholars turn to the immense literature of the West and find that it has little to say about the formation of a free press in democratizing societies (Downing, 1996; O'Neill, 1997; Sparks, 1998). The Western literature starts from the assumption of stable, liberal democracy and thus can offer little insight into how media structures in transition impact upon the new political order, and vice versa. In particular, Western emphasis on press freedom and the watchdog role may conflict with other desirable goals for newly emerging democracies, such as the establishment of a broad democratic culture and nation-building: 'Openness created cacophony, and the expansion of diversity also created the means by which old hatreds could be publicly expressed' (O'Neill, 1997: 2).

A second consequence is that the range of inquiry, albeit fundamental, is narrow. The focus is on media and politics, and usually national politics at that, so we find a concentration of research on political news in the nationally significant press and television. This makes sense if one's starting point is classic liberalism. After all, the media's primary role is to stand guard against abuses of power by the state and, as provider of political information, to enable voters to engage rationally in the electoral process. It is, however, frustrating for those media watchers who notice that politics is only a small, and probably diminishing, proportion of media activity. One need only look at the magazines on the news-stands or the fare offered by the newly emerging cable and satellite channels. Entertainment, a huge part of the media business, features scarcely at all in conventional accounts of media and democracy. James Curran (1996: 85) captures the irony: 'In effect, the received wisdom means defining the role of the media in terms of what it does not do most of the time.'

Yet, if anything, the primacy accorded to the watchdog role strengthened during the 1980s and 1990s, amid debates about the deregulation of broadcasting markets, expanded by the growth of cable, satellite and digital technology (Kelley and Donway, 1990; Holmes, 1990; Veljanovski, 1989). Deregulators appealed to the paramount importance of the watchdog role which necessarily relies on press freedom which, in turn, is guaranteed by a free market and the minimum of state interference. The 1980s tide throughout the USA and Europe was moving towards deregulation, and arguments about the media returned time and again to this state–press relationship (Collins and Murroni, 1996). One of the best and most influential works on democracy and the mass media placed the entire debate within this framework: 'Is regulation of the press justified?' (Lichtenberg, 1990).

The US deregulation arguments were echoed in Europe, as Europe also began to grapple with the consequences of the new communications technology. However, strong traditions of public service within publicly owned broadcasters generated a noticeably different tone. The free market, far from being the best guarantee of a free press, was often perceived as a threat to standards and quality. Highly prized features of public service broadcasting, universality of access, commitment to serious and impartial news, educational programming, quality drama and so on were public 'goods' deserving state protection from the tyranny of the market (Blumler, 1992; Katz, 1996; Garnham, 1990; Scannell, Chapter 6 in this volume). For some critics (Katz 1996; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), the new deregulated order, pulled from below by the expanding market and pushed from above by mainly American global media giants, amounted to a crisis of public communication. The crisis diagnosis, in fact, directly links a decline in civic communication to the mounting difficulties of maintaining traditions of public service in our modern media times. Television, fragmented across multiplying channels,

no longer functions as a nationally shared public space; coverage of public affairs, threatened by the intensified battle for ratings, is being squeezed out of prime time; media globalization jeopardizes public broadcasting's special duty of care for national cultural identities. In short, European researchers were less willing to accept that 'watchdog' was the primary role of the media. Moreover, the free market/watchdog couplet was itself dubious. Curran (1996), for example, cites the experience of Thatcher's Britain when the publicly regulated broadcasters barked loudest, while the privately owned newspapers behaved more as the Prime Minister's cuddly pet.

So, broadly, there has been a battle to shift the emphasis of the debates. On one side are those who wish to entrench the watchdog role (duty no. 1) as the primary task of the press. These are most often pro-deregulation and wish to reclaim the classic liberal commitments to free speech and suspicion of big government. On the other side are those who prefer to establish public representation (duty no. 3) as the predominant role. These are often, but by no means solely, the pro-regulators.

The latter position is commonly expressed in the burgeoning interest in the 'public sphere' – the concept as developed by Jürgen Habermas (1989). The public sphere first impacts on media debates as the basis of the defence of public service broadcasting systems against the potentially undemocratic distortions of deregulated markets (Garnham, 1990; Scannell, Chapter 6 in this volume). Its prime value is that it offers a cogent way out of the regulation/deregulation, state control versus press freedom logjam. Serving the public, rather than supervision of the state, becomes the litmus test of democratic media. Following Habermas, public sphere adherents place the formation of rational and critical public opinion at the centre of true democracy. Thus, the key questions of media inquiry are effectively shifted from duty no. 1 to 'Duty'. To what extent do the media create a forum for rational public debate? To what extent are they representative of social groups? And to what extent are they sensitive to cultural diversity, on the one hand, and contributory to social consensus, on the other?

The public sphere has 'ballooned into the new God-term' of media criticism (Gitlin, 1998: 168) with an explosion of literature in the 1990s (Dahlgren, 1995; Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991; Peters, 1997; Garnham, 1990; Curran, 1996; Hallin, 1994; Page, 1996; Price, 1995; Thompson, 1995; Schulz, 1997). Adherents sometimes claim that the public sphere offers a new way of thinking about the media (Curran, 1996): it has undoubtedly expanded the boundaries of the media democracy debate. Popular culture, soap operas, talk shows and audience participation programmes were added to news and documentary as actual or potential arenas of media democratic input (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). It is doubtful, however, that the profusion of often confusing public sphere literature (Schulz, 1997) has fundamentally changed, or added to, the classic liberal paradigm of media duties.

The Organization of this Volume

The remit of this series is to collect together many of the best journal essays written over the last 40 years. There are 27 journal and newspaper pieces in this volume. They include many of the contemporary leading writers in political communications and they cover the major concerns of media and democracy as outlined above: the media–state relationship, the representation of the public and the provision of information. Together, they examine questions of media and democracy from three perspectives: media as a set of institutions; media as content – specifically,

news; and the media as professional journalistic practice. These themes provide the broad rationale behind the first three parts of the volume. Part IV, which generally includes the most recent essays, deals with challenge and change to media and journalism in the light of the collapse of communism, the rise of the new world order, the advance of the market and the information technology revolution.

Part I identifies some of the key issues in the general debates on media and democracy. The opening two essays take us back to our point of departure – classic liberal democracy – and offer contrasting views of the consequences of 200 years of press freedom in the USA. Thomas Patterson (Chapter 1) criticizes the press for clearly not living up to the expectations held by the USA's founding fathers. Taking the opposing view, Jack McLeod (Chapter 2) is cautiously optimistic. Despite appalling political and commercial pressure, the news media are still guided significantly by public service ideals. He is also sceptical of the 'powerful effects' view implicit in the critics' case, in which media may be made all too easy a scapegoat for wider social ills. In Chapter 3 George Donohue, Phillip Tichenor and Clarice Olien present a critique of the classic Left–Right dispute of whether the media are watchdogs, lapdogs or integral parts of the power oligarchy. They propose instead the concept of the 'guarddog' role of the press, in which media are neither as powerful nor autonomous as suggested by 'fourth estate' theorists, nor as submissive and dependent as suggested by the lapdog critique. Ben Bagdikian's 'supermarket or assembly line' is a seminal essay (Chapter 4). For many years a provocative voice and indispensable reference for questions of media ownership, Bagdikian argues that, despite a vast number of outlets, the range of ideas offered by the US media is remarkably narrow. Although he was writing in the mid-1980s, his concerns are, if anything, even more acute now in the wake of the dizzying series of multinational mergers and acquisitions that are making the vast new infotainment industry a leader of globalization.

The final two essays in Part I lead us into the public sphere debate. Although the two authors, John Keane and Paddy Scannell, are not writing directly against each other, the essays contrast well. Keane is probably the most eloquent of the media critics of the Habermasian public sphere. In Chapter 5 he challenges the concept in principle, as both obsolete and even potentially authoritarian in today's highly pluralist increasingly global culture. Further, he disputes the premises of so many European authors that public service broadcasting must be preserved as an essential core of any democratic media system. Scannell (Chapter 6) details the unobtrusive, everyday contribution of television to democratic life. His focus is specifically the BBC, but his point that television can, and has, helped create a public sphere close to Habermasian ideals has far broader resonance across public service systems worldwide.

Part II concerns the standards of professional journalism. The first two essays, by Morris Janowitz (Chapter 7) and David Manning White (Chapter 8), establish the classic 'gatekeeper' role of the professional journalist. Gatekeepers select the news but are not advocates; hence objectivity remains a goal. They are followed by the inspiring yet nowadays rarely read seminal 1970 essay on newsroom sociology by Gaye Tuchman (Chapter 9), who argues that the norm of objectivity is actually a 'strategic ritual', working in practice more to protect journalists than to seek truth. Twenty years later Wolfgang Donsbach and Bettina Klett (Chapter 11) draw on evidence from four democracies to demonstrate that journalists actually define 'objectivity' subjectively. Thorbjörn Broddason's essay (Chapter 10) leads us into the important debate concerning the desirability of professionalism in journalism. He draws on sociological theories to introduce the idea that 'sacredness' is an important part of the definition of professional.

Ideas of self-sacrifice and public service are key to the professions, distinguishing them from crafts and trades. These 'sacred' functions of journalism are clearly linked to democracy, yet ironically they can be most clearly observed in non-democratic conditions. The final two essays in Part II draw us closer to journalists' self-understanding. John Birt, later to become Director-General of the BBC, and Peter Jay, offer another now rarely read classic. They argue that workplace disciplines have actually produced a 'bias against understanding' in television news. In Chapter 13, Jay Rosen, the leading theoretician of the public journalism movement in the USA, argues for a new kind of journalism. Closely allied to communitarianism, public journalism invites citizen participation in shaping the news and actively seeks to support communities in solving problems.

Part III concerns the anatomy of news, with a number of essays that focus on content and how it is formed. Taken together, these help us understand how news has changed over the past few decades, and how journalists have changed too. Molotch and Lester's essay (Chapter 17) concerns news sources and their power to influence stories. An oil spill in the early 1970s is the real event that led them to offer important insights into the sources of news, and the opportunities of local and national groups to shape interpretations of events. Much of what reporters do, they argue, is to describe events. Mark Levy (Chapter 18) gives a name, 'disdain', to what he identifies in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the response of journalists to the increasing number of pseudo-events in US election campaigns. 'Disdaining the news' is something journalists do, Levy argues, when they are required to report an event by describing it; yet, at the same time, in order to preserve their professional integrity, they seek to distance themselves from what they perceive to be tainted or manipulative phenomena. As journalists began to offer these disdaining comments, politicians had fewer opportunities to speak in the news. In Chapter 19 Daniel Hallin shows how much smaller the television soundbite has become over the 20 years from 1968 to 1988, and argues that politicians have less and less opportunity to get their messages across in their own words. Cappella and Jamieson (Chapter 14) argue that the modern trends in journalism, to more disdaining, interpretative styles, may have dangerous repercussions for democracy, effectively creating a spiral of delegitimation for the democratic process as a whole.

The remaining two essays in Part III look at the impact on journalist norms of two increasingly significant developments. Joseph Turow identifies a surprisingly underresearched problem of conflict of interest. He investigates the ways in which journalists at *Time* magazine covered stories concerning the magazine's corporate owner, Time Warner, and finds that journalists have entered a 'silent bargain' in which norms of objectivity may be replaced by a belief in a reward system for cautious, loyal and frequent coverage of their parent organization. At the very least, conflicts over self-coverage engendered suspicions that devalued the credibility of the journal in the eyes of the very journalists who create it. Turow was writing in the context of the growth of new media/entertainment corporate umbrellas. Since his essay (1994) the problem he describes has been greatly exacerbated by the moves of non-entertainment industrial giants – for example, General Electric, Seagram and telecommunications companies – into media ownership, and by the expansion of existing media owners, such as Time Warner, Walt Disney and Murdoch's News Corporation, across more and more leisure-based business.

Elihu Katz (Chapter 16) paints a vivid picture of watching the Gulf War, from his television in Jerusalem. Post-Cold War conflicts require a new reporting frame, since the old ideological frame of free world versus communism has died. The one favoured for the Gulf was the Second

World War: Saddam as Hitler; Iraq as fascist Germany committing genocide against its own minorities. The similarities with the framing of Serbia and Milosevic are obvious. Most striking for Katz, though, was how journalists virtually abandoned their normal editorial functions in their haste to keep news live. The success of CNN is the symbol of the failure of journalism: 'goodbye to the editors', he says.

Part IV concerns new challenges and developments in the media. In Chapter 20 Jay Blumler and Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem argue for a new television order, based on a competitive complementarity between public and private sectors, as a model of democratic broadcasting into the new millennium. Colin Sparks (Chapter 21) looks at the decline of political content in the popular press and argues that this is a phenomenon of mature market-based democracies. It is senseless to blame either the press or consumers for the increasing trivialization of media, he says, and no amount of noble tinkering will make any real difference. He hypothesizes that the more stable 'a bourgeois democracy is the less interest the mass of the population will have in its workings and the more apolitical and trivial the popular press will become'. A logical conclusion is that media critics should broaden their horizons from the details of media failings to examine democratic participation as a whole. Philip Schlesinger's essay (Chapter 23) looks at globalization in the post-Cold War era and its effects on national identities and cultures. He notes that cultural imperialism, once a concern of the Third World, is now a theme of Western European audiovisual policy.

Karol Jakubowicz (Chapter 22) and Ronald Dworkin (Chapter 24) offer us contrasting perspectives on the importance of freedom of speech. Jakubowicz assesses the prospects for press freedom in post-communist Eastern Europe and argues that a redefinition of journalism, from propaganda-style advocacy to professional codes of impartiality, is an essential condition of progress. This process is impeded as much by the former underground dissident writers as by the old guard of official media, he says. Journalists' continued definition of freedom of speech as freedom to express their own political biases is thus presented as a barrier to the development of stable democracy. Ronald Dworkin, by contrast, gives a stirring defence of freedom of speech as a fundamental human right, against the claims of intellectuals who consider it a relative value. We may, and must, protect minorities from discrimination, he argues. But to intervene further upstream by forbidding hate speech and other expressions of loathsome prejudice is effectively to destroy the only democratic justification we have for insisting that everyone should obey the law.

The final essays, by Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan, Kenneth Hacker and John Sutherland all look at the impact of the Internet. The first two deal with both the theoretical and empirical possibilities of the Internet for democratic communication, while Sutherland's essay looks specifically at Internet news. He analyses the infamous Drudge Report and its part in the Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal, the 'first Internet-driven' story. The most important impact of the Internet, argues Sutherland, is not the massive expansion of propriety information sources, but exactly the kind of material that Drudge peddles: gossipy news about the famous and powerful, which often relies on unverifiable rumour and whose chief virtue for consumers – precisely because it admits a lower threshold of truth – is that it publishes normally unprintable stories. He predicts a future of a new school of 'Drudge journalism', long after the original has disappeared, and speculates on the consequences for more orthodox news reporting.

Inevitably any selection must leave out a great deal. Our selection process weeded out all essays, no matter how good, that were considered too parochial in terms of topic or place. This

gives an undeniable advantage to the US literature. As the world's only remaining superpower, the USA is the only country that may write about itself and be more or less assured of global interest. Furthermore, because the modern study of political communications began in the USA, American literature is easily the most prolific and offers much of the best and we discovered that a number of older seminal pieces by US writers were not easily accessible in Europe, even in prestigious university libraries. Nonetheless, we were concerned to strike a balance across European and US traditions of scholarship, and to ensure representation for both the media studies and political science wings of political communication.

Our greatest omission is examples of essays on media effects which we decided not to include partly for provocative reasons. Effects research has broadened considerably since the initial studies of the 1950s and 1960s, which established the limited effects paradigm. Nonetheless, most social studies confirm the absence of dramatic, strong effects, even though admitting the methodological difficulties of isolating media effects from the complex combination of social stimuli (Graber, 1997: 1–28). There is, as Graber notes, a huge discrepancy between social science appraisals and the general public belief (reflected in public policy) that the mass media are highly influential. Part of our purpose here is to demonstrate the significance of media to democratic life, regardless of quantifiable effects.

Jay Blumler once memorably remarked that the study of media without study of the audience response was like sexology without the orgasm (Blumler, 1980: 373). That was one good reason to include Blumler's article among our list of seminal pieces that did not make it into this volume. Other 'effects' essays include: William McGuire's overview of the media effects literature, 'The Myth of Massive Media Impact' (1986); Noelle-Neumann's classic 'Spiral of Silence' (1974); McCombs' and Shaw's 'The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press' (1972); Clarke and Fredin's empirical finding that newspapers, rather than television, are the key agents of political information (1978); Stephen Bennett's fascinating discovery that, despite educational improvements and a new abundance of media information, the public remain as generally ignorant of political affairs as they were in the 1940s but surprisingly, there was no clear correspondence between lack of knowledge and political alienation (1988); James Curran's appraisal of the new revisionism in audience research and reception studies (1990); and Bartel's discussion of whether media's political impact is really more fugitive than minimal (1993).

Excellent essays that were closer to our general criteria but were not selected for various reasons include: Michael Schudson's much reprinted classic sociology of news production (1989); Winfried Schulz's anatomy of the media-constituted public sphere (1997); David Swanson's analysis of changes in the 'political-media complex' after 50 years of political communications study (1997); Charlotte Grimes on the civic journalism bandwagon (1997); Donald Browne's comparative study of international newsrooms (1983); David Weaver's examination of the 'professionalization' of journalism around the globe (1997); Nigel Harris's assessment of journalism as profession from the point of view of ethical standards (1990); Kepplinger and Köcher's provocative argument that too strict a definition of professionalism may conflict with fundamental requirements of journalism (1990); David Weaver *et al.*'s study of press freedom and Third World economic development (1985); Umberto Eco on the intellectual's duty to draw the line at 'intolerable' expressions of opinion (1994); George Orwell on the writer's duty to tell the truth (1997); and Cmiel's discussion of the impact of the Second World War on the intellectual origins of communication research (1996).

Democracy and the Media

Margaret Scammell

Democracy – its meaning and operation in practice – is fiercely contested. Democracy as self-description has been claimed by all sorts of society, from the countries of the West to the socialist republics of the former Soviet Union and present-day China. ‘Those who wish to defend a regime, whatever its nature may be, will call it democracy’, as George Orwell put it (1957: 149). By the end of the twentieth century, the specifically Western models of democracy seemingly snowballed to ascendancy throughout the globe, with the complete self-discrediting of Soviet communist systems, African socialism and bureaucratic authoritarianism (Diamond and Plattner, 1993: ix). In 1975 only 32 per cent of the world’s countries were considered democratic by Western standards. By 1995, 74 per cent were, judging generously by the measures of at least some sort of competitive elections and formal guarantees of civil rights (Potter *et al.*, 1997: 1–9). The glorious moment of Western triumph, signalled in Fukuyama’s famous phrase ‘the end of history’, was short-lived. Civil wars, ethnic genocide in Eastern Europe and Africa and the rise of Muslim fundamentalism quickly shattered any illusions. The West itself has been increasingly troubled by signs of apathy and declining political participation, fears of an increasingly uncivic culture, and an upsurge in neofascist movements in Europe and even the USA. Far from striding forward confidently, democratic theory resembles a ‘homeless drunk’ staggering uncertainly in search of a lamppost for support (Keane, 1993). At a time of unprecedented democratic ferment, the task of understanding media’s role in democracy has never been more urgent.

We have argued that media inquiry relies overwhelmingly on the classic liberal conception of democracy. We have suggested also that democratic theory rarely addresses the role and functions of media. Now we look more closely at the leading twentieth-century models of democracy and assess what kind of media they would require. This is necessarily a patchwork job, piecing together inferences. However, it is essential, demonstrating clearly that the several models of democracy have quite different demands of media. The ideal models (following Held, 1996) that we consider here are: socialism; competitive elitism; pluralist and neopluralist models; what Held calls ‘legal democracy’; the New Right and libertarianism; and participatory democracy, the New Left and its deliberative and communitarian cousins.

Socialism

In principle, socialism seeks freedom as a prime goal so that the potential of all human beings may be realized. Freedom for all requires the development of economic equality and an end to economic exploitation. The general conditions of existence for socialism are the unity of the working classes, the defeat of the capitalist classes and an end to class privilege, the end of economic scarcity and the progressive integration of state and society. Public affairs are to be conducted through communes or councils organized in a pyramidal structure. All citizens may participate directly in the communes or councils at the base of this pyramid. Decisions taken at the summit are in accordance with delegated democracy, and all elected public officials may be held to account via the appropriate councils and communes.

What kind of media would this ideal type of socialism require? The watchdog function is not needed. The state is not seen as a potentially threatening autonomous actor, but as a class

agent acting on behalf of the working class. This is the first and clear difference from liberal democracy. It stems from the conception of the state as an instrument for the maintenance of class rule. Thus a socialist state will be a working-class state (the 'dictatorship or the proletariat') while the 'bourgeois state' is an agent of the capitalist class. The state is not seen, as in classic liberal theory, as an autonomous, self-aggrandizing, potentially despotic living creature. The state *might* act autonomously, according to Marx, but only in exceptional circumstances, such as, famously, the 1848 revolution in France when the country was in political turmoil and the class forces were more or less equally balanced. In normal circumstances the state is merely an agent of class rule. Logically, therefore, the socialist state will not act against the interests of the proletariat; rather it will protect their interests and there is no need for a media watchdog against it.

The theoretical need for media to provide information is strong in the socialist model but is *less* crucial than for classic liberalism because all citizens may participate directly in debate and decision-making in their communes and councils, and these provide alternative forums for the circulation of public information. There may be some requirement for media to represent the spectrum of public opinion but only in a limited sense because the broad unity of working class interests is assumed, the capitalist class has been destroyed and the relatively minor differences of opinion which remain may be aired fully through the democratic councils and communes. Thus, in contrast to liberal democracy, socialism offers a model of media essentially stripped to its informational functions.

The early and idealistic years of Bolshevism suggest other key democratic functions of media. Art and culture were valued as intrinsically good and, hence, the media were essential for dissemination of culture and as works of art in themselves. Education, deemed vital for the triumph of socialism, clearly required media. Socialist propaganda, conceived primarily as education with none of the disparaging connotations later associated with the term, was also a fundamental function of media. In fact, the terms 'education' and 'propaganda' were used interchangeably by the Bolsheviks (Benn, 1989; Kenez, 1985). Thus, overall, the prime socialist requirements for media were for information, culture and propaganda/education. These functions are suggested as requirements of the *ideal* of socialism, based on its principles. They are probably also descriptively accurate for the socialism in practice of the former Soviet Union. Legally permitted media clearly did not function as a watchdog, nor did they offer the range of public opinion representative of the Soviet people as a whole, as became abundantly clear in the period of *glasnost* and during the transition to democracy. Media did, however, attend to their information, education and cultural roles. Arguably the propaganda/education function soon came to predominate, amid conditions of civil war and external hostility following the Bolshevik revolution. This conclusion fits with historians' descriptions of the Soviet Union as, variously, the 'propaganda state' or the 'schoolmaster state' (Benn, 1989).

Competitive Elitist Democracy

The two most influential theorists of democratic elitism are Joseph Schumpeter and Max Weber who offered critiques of both socialism and classic liberalism, using empirical evidence to demonstrate that democracy in modern industrial society actually worked in practice much differently from the ideals envisaged by either liberal or socialist philosophy. Further, they claimed that the pictures that they presented were not only realistic but also offered desirable