REALISM IN SOCIAL REPRESENTATION AND THE FATE OF THE PUBLIC

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The King's Body

Medieval Europe did not know institutional spheres of public and private as the Greeks and Romans did, but it did contribute one crucial dimension to the enduring repertoire of options of conceiving public life. The king's body served as the first of many devices of symbolic condensation for social affairs. The idea of a public realm of citizens or a sociological aggregate — "the public" — did not exist until the eighteenth century. In medieval political thought, only one person was **public**, in the sense of being estimable and worthy of visibility: the feudal lord. Likewise, the trappings of office and "symbols of sovereignty, for instance the princely seal, were deemed 'public'" (Habermas 1962/1974, 50). Habermas calls this form of publicity "representative," an initially confusing term that uses the connotations of prestige, ceremony, and imposingness in the German word **Repräsentation**. Such publicity makes no reference to an open social site where citizens (a notion arguably quite lost from Augustine till perhaps Rousseau) participate in politics through discussion. It is rather the glory of power created by the personal presence of the feudal lord and estates (Habermas 1962/1974, 51; Habermas 1962/1989, 12-14). In contrast to the bourgeois public sphere, the medieval public sphere involved the display of prestige, not criticism, spectacle, not debate, and appearance **before** the people, not on their behalf (Habermas 1962/1989, 8). Its logic is succinctly stated by Prospero at the beginning of a performance within Shakespeare's **The Tempest**: "No tongue! all eyes! be silent" (IV.i.59).

A similar sense of the potency of the person informs the doctrine of the king's two bodies (Kantorowicz 1957; cf. Hariman 1995, ch. 3). The king, as stated by Queen Elizabeth's lawyers, has both a "body natural" and a

"body politic," the one being his physical, mortal body, the other being the state as a metaphysical, immortal corporation. The natural body of the king thus **represented** the body politic, as in the instructive if apocryphal dictum of Louis XIV: **l'état, c'est moi**. This is not representation in the sense of a one-to-one correspondence between a symbol and a reality (as in the representative sample of polls) or of a number of representatives to a central assembly. Rather, the king is the body politic, or serves as an allegory of it. The body has long served as a microcosm of society, from antiquity through Herbert Spencer, but the king served as a real presence of the cosmopolitical order, not a pale reflection of some elusive but deeper reality. This fusion of body, will, and polity was of course a central target of modern political theory and agitation from the seventeenth century on, culminating in a couple of spectacular beheadings, Charles I and Louis XVI, that symbolically sought to sever this linkage.

But the executioner and the guillotine did not banish the royal ghost. The longing for political presence lingers today, both in the practice of the mass media, which serve as the successor to the king's body, condensing a mess of empirical fact into a comprehensible image, and in the recurrent dream in political theory of assembly or face-to-face participation.

Modern Media and Representation of the Public

Giving form to the public body has become, in many ways, the stewardship of the media of representation over the past two and a half centuries. Given a sufficiently broad definition, it is easy to see mass media in a wide variety of social orders, not only modern, electrified ones (Curran 1982; Menache 1990). All social orders have probably cultivated large pictures of the world that surpass anyone's powers of experience or sensation, but modernity is distinguished by the portrayal of actualities. But I want to place the distinctness of modern forms of mass media in the eighteenth century, with the rise of a new vision and practice of realistic social representation. Modern ideas of democracy, as of society and the public, are coeval with new literary techniques for representing social wholes. Novels, newspapers, encyclopaedias, and social statistics make their decisive first appearance in the eighteenth century. All attempt to describe a social world in which first-hand acquaintance alone is no longer sufficient; the novel, as Georg Lukács (1915/1965) and Raymond Williams (1973) have shown, is a genre socially and historically tied to the disappearance of "knowable communities." Such forms of social representation offer panoramic surveys of the social horizon. In a very loose sense, they were among the first techniques of sampling populations.

Forms such as newspapers, novels, maps, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, statistics and demography, scatterplots and pie charts, zoos, museums, the census, and visual panoramas all fabricate representable totalities beyond the direct acquaintance of any mortal. The king's presence condensed the cosmos into a microcosm, but new forms did so by empirical representation. Objects such as the whole of human knowledge (**l'encylopédie**), the English language (Samuel Johnson's dictionary), or national birth or death rates came to be knowable as empirical totalities. Uniquely modern is the claim of indexical verifiability, that is, of realism.

With realism, I intend something vaguer than specific political, metaphysical, literary, artistic, or scientific doctrines or practices. It is a disputed term, but I use it to refer to that long revolution in social representation and self-knowledge, beginning in eighteenth-century Europe, which links the early impetus of the newspaper and the novel

with the more recent statistical sample and polling research. The project is the making visible of society, not as an allegory like the king's body, but as a fact. The famous lines from Stendhal's ***The Red and the Black***, though strictly speaking most appropriate to nineteenth-century realism in French literature, capture much of what I have in mind: "A novel, sir, is a mirror carried along a great road. It reflects to your eyes the blue of the sky as well as the puddles in the road" (1830/1964, 361). Realism in representation broke through taboos about low or vulgar style, with the profound social consequence that ordinary life could be brought into the light of public knowledge. Things that no one had ever thought to study systematically — births, marriages, deaths, diseases, incomes, opinions — can become visible and amenable to analysis only in a large, and quite revolutionary, loosening of older inhibitions about the representation of the world in all its elegance **and** vulgarity (Auerbach 1953; Watt 1957).

What is even more important in the sense of realism I am attempting to articulate is the claim to factuality. One might say that myth anciently performed what the news does for us today: give a sense of the forces that order—and disorder—our universe. But there is a qualitative shift in the claim made for the news that its truth can be verified. The stock market reports do not belong to the same order of truth as Greek myths. We have learned to view the reports as possessing a density and currency of verifiable reference that the myths lack. The claim that representations of social forces can be cashed in for the hard currency of observation or at least documentation continues to inform the diverse practices of the mass media, which we should not conceive only as newspapers, magazines, cinema, radio, and television, nor even the more various forms of information and entertainment, but as all practices of social envisioning, reporting and documentation, including statistics, accounting, insurance, census-taking, polling, the work of social services and of the social sciences. These techniques enable society and the public.

Though it is quite plausible to take the twentieth century as the critical moment when the range of the visible outstrips the unaided eye for large portions of the population, practices of graphically representing large numbers have a longer ancestry reaching at least to the eighteenth century (Ludes 1992; Tufte 1983). The social novel and statistics are each an answer to the problem of how to display a cross-section of a quantitative complexity. One uses narrative, the other aggregation. Both enact—and depend on—a new apprehension of space and time: the possibility of arranging spatially dispersed events at a single moment in time (Anderson 1991). (The simultaneity of representations is loosely tied to the integration of regional and world systems.) A novel might weave several strands of plot with the device of "meanwhile"; statistics could do so with a "cross-section." **Letters**, a term which once meant the whole of literature and now only means correspondence, were a central narrative structuring device. The shuttling of letters in the epistolary novel, such as Richardson's ***Pamela***, Rousseau's ***Julie***, or Goethe's ***Werther***, was an apt metaphor for the shuttling of point of view from one character, place, time, or line of plot to another, a kind of criss-crossing imagination of an emergent social totality (just as the telephone was and continues to be a device motivating cinematic cross-cutting; Kessler 1991).

Statistics were another means of imagining social wholes as simultaneities. Statistics, a term translated from the German term **Statistik** in the eighteenth century, originally signified the comparative (and often competitive) study of **states** and their climates, geography, and demography. Statistics are an emblem of the shift from the

presence of the king's body to the realistic representation of the body politic. Statistical techniques offer knowledge for social and political management, what Foucault calls "bio-power," providing elites with intelligence of aggregate phenomena needed to control populations, tax incomes, or raise armies. By the early nineteenth century, what Ian Hacking (1990) calls "the avalanche of printed numbers" was set in motion by the liberal utilitarian reformers staffing western European bureaucracies, and statistical data accumulated about marriage and divorce, birth and death, class, income, crime, suicide, and other kinds of deviancy. That **population** remains the technical term for any statistical aggregate attests to the bio-political origins of the practice.

Like newspapers, novels, and encyclopaedias, statistics represent entities that defy immediate mortal acquaintance. They are a tool for rendering what one could only imagine into an intelligible microcosm. These forms give a panoramic **tour d'horizon** of a vast social collective, often nationally defined. They are means of arraying intelligence of otherwise intangible totalities into a condensed form.

A newspaper, likewise, aggregates the diversity of its material first and foremost by date, as Anderson notes. Like the encyclopaedia, the chief principles of narrative organisation in the daily press are miscellaneity and comprehensiveness. In it, articles find themselves juxtaposed to others with whom they share no immediate relation, except that they occurred on the same date (or, in the case of the encyclopaedia, share initial letters of the alphabet). Like social interaction in the city, the newspaper and encyclopaedia juxtapose unacquainted subjects in a common space. One genre treats the variables, the other the constants (Sloterdijk 1981). The newspaper, as a vernacular form, stands somewhere between the novelistic and the statistical as modes of social reportage (Davis 1983). The tension between story and information, as Michael Schudson (1978), borrowing a page from Walter Benjamin (1936/1968), has argued, structures twentieth-century journalistic genres: human interest stories and stock market reports, narrations of sporting feats and box scores. The polarity of narrative and data marks the twin extremities of realistic social description since the eighteenth century, with many hybrid forms between. Academic battles between number-crunchers and tale-spinners in the social sciences are only a late and local variant on this larger theme.

The Prosthetic Body Politic

The bourgeois public sphere is inseparable from such techniques of representation. Yet it tends to legitimate itself with images drawn from political assemblies, leading to a tension in its chief product and **raison d'être**, public opinion. Public opinion claims to be the voice of the people, a clear and direct utterance from the citizenry assembled as one. Keith Baker (1990, 172) argues that the modern notion of the public originates in "the transfer of ultimate authority from the public person of the sovereign to the sovereign person of the public" that took place in late eighteenth-century France. The public, then, is a sort of corporate personality, a successor of sorts to the monarch. For the ancients up to the eighteenth century, the constitution of this body in assemblies was generally taken for granted. Today the Athenian agora, the Roman forum, the London coffee-house, the New England town meeting, or the African-American church still captivate the imagination of democratic thinkers. The problem is that the forms of communication that normative democratic theory posits as necessary for the formation of an enlightened public opinion—dialogue, interaction, infor-

mation-gathering, and participation—are out of phase with the vastness and organised power of communication and representation in modern nation-states. Even from its beginning, the bourgeois public sphere was international in scope and constituted as a textual artefact, particularly in journalism. As Habermas (1962/1989, 43) notes of readers of the **Spectator** and **Tatler**, two of the pioneers in English literary journalism, "the public [**das Publikum**] that read and debated this sort of thing read and debated about itself." The "public" was thus a reflexive creature of its description by moral weeklies and other institutions of vernacular literature; since its eighteenth-century birth it has perhaps always been at least partly a virtual phenomenon, a symbolic diaspora anchored by diverse sites appointed for conversation. The claim to realistic representation thus depends on some kind of symbolic constitution of the object to be represented in the first place. How to reconcile the longing for presence or assembly—the roar, hisses, and cheers of the crowd, the debates and festive rubbing of shoulders with fellow-citizens—with the fact of representation is a problem in modern democratic theory that has received a number of answers.

One answer is wide-ranging public discussion, anchored in parliament. J. S. Mill, often seen as exemplifying what is best and what is most contradictory in the liberal tradition, is both an advocate of the extension of the franchise and political participation and a critic of democratised culture. He calls for a combination of mediated and face-to-face discourse in a kind of compromise with scale. A key passage from Mill's **Representative Government** (1861/1952, 330) reads:

> In the ancient world, though there might be, and often was, great individual or local independence, there could be nothing like a regulated popular government beyond the bounds of a single city-community; because there did not exist the physical conditions for the formation and propagation of a public opinion, except among those who could be brought together to discuss public matters in the same agora. This obstacle is generally thought to have ceased by the adoption of a representative system. But to surmount it completely, required the press, and even the newspaper press, the real equivalent, though not in all respects an adequate one, of the Pnyx and the Forum.

This quote beautifully captures the notion of the newspaper as a surrogate for assembly on a mammoth scale. Mill sees Parliament as the sounding board of the national conversation. Parliament inherits the tasks of the bourgeois public sphere for Mill, the site of debate and discussion. It is "to be at once the nation's Committee of Grievances, and its Congress of Opinions" (Mill, 361). It ought "to indicate wants, to be an organ for popular demands, and a place of adverse discussion for all opinions relating to public matters, both great and small" (p. 362). In **Representative Government**, Mill gives an institutional location for the debate and discussion he called for in **On Liberty**. Though Mill assumes that the actual work of government will be done by a cadre of elites specially trained for public service — the many talk but the few administer — he believes public discussion not only to be a school of moral and intellectual virtue but also the chief avenue of political participation, along with such forms of political engagement as voting, jury duty, running for or holding office. Popular government must have "utmost possible publicity and liberty of discussion, whereby not merely a few individuals in succession, but the whole public, are made, to a certain extent, participants in the government, and sharers in the instruction and mental exercise derivable from it" (p. 363). Parliament is the hub, but it sends spokes of en-

lightenment into the nation at large: "and it is from political discussion, and collective political action, that one whose daily occupations concentrate his interests in a small circle round himself, learns to feel for and with his fellow-citizens, and becomes consciously a member of a great community" (p. 382).

Mill, as we see in that key phrase, "great community," was a Deweyan **avant la lettre**. American progressive intellectuals sought a forum that was able to collect the geographically scattered character of democratic life in the United States. Not impressed as Mill by the potential of legislative assemblies as the central theatre of public discussion, Dewey, Park, and Cooley, among others, turned to the other side of Mill's analysis of how modern, dispersed democracy could flourish: the newspaper. Mill, as we have seen, thought the newspaper a kind of prosthetic replacement for the Athenian Pnyx or Roman Forum; it is, he says, a real but not fully adequate equivalent. The progressives, in contrast, worry little about how replacements create uncanny doubles and phantom pains. The newspaper served them consistently as an adequate fix for the problems of social scale and a panacea for the defects of American democracy.

Charles Horton Cooley, for instance, announced to his journal in 1892 that he had found the social sensorium in the newspaper (Quandt 1970). Herbert Spencer, the looming presence for all American social thinkers in Cooley's generation, discovered anatomical analogies in society, worked out in tedious detail. There were societal digestive and muscular systems, but there was no societal nervous system, no central place of co-ordination and control. A social brain would, after all, blend uneasily with Spencer's **laissez-faire** political and moral economy. The progressives thought that his description of co-ordination without community, aggregation without society, a social body without a social mind, was an inadvertent cry to arms. In Cooley's view, Spencer's mistake was to take as a given what was an outrageous social deficit. Cooley's discovery of the social sensorium at the same time John Dewey, his teacher at the University of Michigan, was contemplating a revolutionary newspaper, ***Thought News***, a sort of daily encyclopaedia for the people, foreshadows a characteristic strand of progressive thinking about mass communication: what society lacks (a sense of community or spiritual unity) new forms of communication will supply. They thought the losses in face-to-face communication in the great society could be compensated by new mechanisms of distance communication.

Unlike Mill, the chief concern of the progressives was not political participation in any narrow sense. They worried about dislocation, alienation, drift—the political and spiritual effects of speed, bulk, and disorder in late nineteenth-century urbanisation and industrialisation. The communal dimension in American life was for them not simply an object of nostalgia but an enduring normative ideal of how people ought to communicate with one another. Social relations of give and take, acquaintance, and co-operation, and intellectual skills of recognising and debating the social forces that shaped one's world, were, they thought, not antiquated dreams doomed to disappear with agrarian America, but a moral code fit for any just democratic polity, in whatever material conditions. Robert Park, who with Franklin Ford, was part of the ***Thought News*** misadventure, and later one of the key consolidators of sociology as an academic discipline with the University of Chicago as its centre, later described the natural history of the American newspaper as an attempt to restore what the village once provided: familiarity with everything that is going on, acquaintance with the people who live around one (Park 1923). For the progressives, like Mill, the newspaper was a

means to initiate people into a great community. The difference was that Mill thought the great community was already there, waiting (perhaps reluctantly) to welcome the newly enfranchised classes. The progressives thought the great community was in eclipse, but revivable through instruments of communication at a distance. If lack of community was the problem, communication was the answer. The problem was their blindness to the contrast between interaction and imparting.

Centralised staging and dispersed talk: the configuration remains central to both liberal political theory and to the intellectual history of studies of the social and political meaning of mass communication. The tradition of mass communication research associated with Paul Lazarsfeld and his students centres on the intertwining of face-to-face and mediated messages in what they called variously supplementation, personal influence, or the two-step flow. This tradition, until recently, has, like the progressives, tended to think that conversation is not importantly out of step with the requisites of social scale (Simonson 1996). The dangers of visual representation (the spectacles of the media universe) can be held in check by the chatter of political representation (the interchange among neighbours and between ordinary folks and their representatives). The recent argument sees spectacular representation as a precondition for political discussion, the framer or informer of civic debate. As Elihu Katz has quipped, "no conversation without representation." The effects tradition has thus made explicit its Millian picture of communication at the societal level: a central theatre of political discourse links and triggers scattered conversations through the land. But the theatre is television, not Parliament.

Lippmann's Strange Realism

The assault on the Progressive dream was made with singular force by Walter Lippmann, whose scepticism about an informed public supported by a newspaper prosthesis paralleled the 1920s scepticism about face-to-face presence in writers such as Kafka, T. S. Eliot, or Virginia Woolf. Both modernists and "democratic realists" such as Lippmann saw the other side of mediation. Lippmann saw the obstacles in media forms; the modernists saw the face-to-face as itself mediated. Lippmann's **Public Opinion** (1922) assessed the damage. His distrust was not directed against media trying to reconstitute the human touch (as with the telephone or radio), but those claiming to represent the world outside; his target was not audio-visual media, but the press, specifically the news media. The hearing and seeing aid of journalistic representation was not a replacement but an obstacle. The best-known chapter from the book, "The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads," set up the classic contrast between reality (the world outside) and the images and symbols we make about it (the pictures in our heads; the epigraph for the book is taken from Plato's story of the captives in the cave). His book is sometimes taken as a critique of the ideal of objectivity in journalism, but the virulence of his nostalgia for an immediate access to the facts only underscores his implicit claim that knowledge ideally should be unclouded by images.

Consider the often-read but rarely analysed opening of **Public Opinion** — the fable of an Atlantic island on which people of English, French, and German nationality have resided for a long time. Due to two-month intervals in the delivery of mail, these people got the news of the outbreak of world war I six weeks late. "For six strange weeks they had acted as friends," Lippmann concludes, "when in fact they were enemies" (1922, 3). This fable is intended to illustrate the ways that all citizens every-

where can be out of touch with the environment in which they live — persisting in their own little realities, when in fact the world has changed. It serves Lippmann as a little allegory of the fate of philosophical democrats in the early twentieth century, acting as if when their reality has vanished. Lippmann points us to the islanders' folly, caught in a time warp, going through the motions as if all were well, when "in fact" it was not. But he does not notice the strangeness of his own "in fact" or the even more bizarre fact that a community of friends could be turned inside out by when they received those bundles of processed wood pulp covered with small black markings that we call newspapers. All the magical thinking and wish-fulfilment that Lippmann imputes to the psychology of the common people appear at the heart of what Lippmann wants to take as "fact," the world outside as it makes its way to the pictures in our head via the news. Lippmann wants realistic representation to cure the public of all this superstitiousness, but he fails to note that the world outside is constituted precisely by representations. It is curious that he calls for recording of reality when he sees so lucidly just how much of "reality" (world war I, for instance) was spun and manipulated by insiders such as himself in ways that really did win or lose battles, consent, and lives. Lippmann sees social construction everywhere, but he wants to transcend it. Even this lesson was long forgotten by his disciples who saw in public opinion polling a cleaner way to get at the pulse of democracy. Lippmann hails objectivity as a norm at the very moment that its historical relevance is fading. Minerva's owl takes flight only in the gathering dusk . . .

Lippmann's facts are thus indistinguishable from representations. Moreover, Lippmann counts the communication lag as an aberration and the island's communal life as defectively out of step; he has already pulled us into a regime in which governmental speech acts in media take priority over practical social worlds. Lippmann has no trust in the face-to-face, and much of the book's most withering critique is directed against the idea that twentieth century people could live in a self-contained community or have the epistemological powers to envision the complexity of the world's transactions. His answer to the crisis of an informed public is statistical totalities, one of the abiding options in realist social representation since the eighteenth century. Like the modernists, face-to-face talk has become the special case, an island in a larger universe of communication flows. This makes the task of communication with the public elusive indeed. Both newspapers and individual citizens end up as voices crying in the wilderness.

While arguing that knowledge must not settle for mere images, Lippmann described a world in which "facts" are increasingly alien to the experience of concrete individuals. His plea for journalism — like all other agencies of social representation—to turn to the facts ironically appears at a moment when the classic priority of reality over symbols is superseded. His call exhumes a rhetoric — one of the purgation of images and the quest for the real — precisely at the point of its exhaustion in terms of descriptive relevance (but not cultural power). When Lippmann (1922, 14) writes, "For it is clear enough that under certain conditions, men respond as powerfully to fictions as they do to realities, and that they in many cases help to create the very fictions to which they respond," he think himself diagnosing a defect of the human psyche but we can see that he is also laying bare the logic of post-modern political order. His iconoclastic assault on media as purveyors of idolatrous images paradoxically coincides with the discovery that reality can be defined by symbols.

Lippmann is quite explicit about the surpassing of the old organs of sensation and the need for modern supplements. Like Freud (1930/1961) in ***Civilization and its Discontents*** seven years later, Lippmann argues that the need for the technological supplements, whether of media or polling information, stems from the fact that we are not gods.

> *The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance. [...] Yet this same creature has invented ways of seeing what no naked eye could see, of hearing what no ear could hear, of weighing immense masses and infinitesimal ones, of counting and separating more items than he can individually remember* (Lippmann 1922, 29).

Unlike Freud, Lippmann thinks the answer is a better prosthesis, more intelligence about social life. Such would allow vision at a distance and deception at a distance, since (in the familiar story), mediation introduces go-betweens, Kafkaesque ghosts who feed in the limbo between transmission and reception. (The term "cyberspace" was originally coined to describe the peculiarly liminal space along the telephone wires between one caller and another.) Despite novel forms of knowledge and record, most citizens remain, in Lippmann's view, the victims of pseudo-environments and stereotypes. The body politic is not only out of reach: it never appears except as a fiction or abstraction. Just like the "other" in the idealist longing for impossible otherness, the public is separated from the sender by grievous gaps.

Even Lippmann's philosophical antagonist John Dewey saw the public an unwelcome intruder from the grave in certain technical matters: "the public and its organisational ends is not only a ghost, but a ghost which walks and talks, and obscures, confuses, and misleads governmental action in a disastrous way" (Dewey 1927, 125). For Dewey, as for Lippmann, the crisis of democracy is a crisis of communication. Dewey sees the lack of participatory interaction as the most alienating feature of the age. The notion that interaction can cure the alienations of modernity is shared widely in the 1920s: Buber wants to turn I-It relationships into I-Thou ones; Heidegger calls for authentic confrontations instead of distraction; Hegelian Marxists such as Lukács, Marcuse, or Adorno are beginning to call for a joyful reconciliation of subject and object instead of pervasive reification, in the wake of the discovery of the early Marx. Dewey seeks to restore interaction as the principle of large-scale democracy but the vexations that await that project he does not see in 1927. To his credit, Dewey did not see communication as the problem of putting private minds **en rapport**. Rather, communication is, in his view, the problem of getting people to be full, participating members in the public life of a community. Without this common partaking, society is a herd, not a democratic, human association. As Dewey (1916, 87) said, democracy is "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." But like Cooley, Dewey did not imagine the potential overtaxation of human energies in requiring each citizen to be a participant; he saw no gap between the logic of face-to-face interaction and the dispersion of mass communication. In terms of his analysis of the political and communicative conditions in the twentieth century, Lippmann was surely on the right side of this debate, a fact forgotten in recent recountings (Peters 1997).

Lippmann, and even Dewey at moments, is representative of a larger tradition in the twentieth century that has found the public a phantom, a being of whose presence one can never be sure. Social scientists, pollsters, marketers, activists, politicians, educational broadcasters, advertisers, reformers, evangelists, and political philosophers

have all had occasion to lament the elusiveness or fickleness of "the public." From Lippmann and Carl Schmitt (1923) to Jean Baudrillard (1983) and Bruce Robbins (1993), conservative and radical thinkers have sought to expose the fictive character of this grand, all-legitimating trope of democracy. From Dewey to Habermas to recent theorists of civil society, others, generally of a progressive bent, have bravely taken the bad news about the public's spectral character, still seeking to make notions of the public a lever to reform, normative imagination, or social criticism (for example, Carey 1995; Rosen 1994; Westbrook 1991; Garnham 1992; Scannell 1989). Whatever the take on the public, all parties have to agree — at the peril, otherwise, of a cruel disillusionment — that popular will is today inseparable from the apparatuses that register and make it an object of signification, whether broadcast or print news, government documents, the census, demographic research, the discourse of theorists, activists and professionals who work "in the name of" the public, or the assemblies of those who protest or otherwise put their bodies on the line, duly televised to the rest of us. Contemporary conditions require us to part with the longing for presence in democracy—the affliction of Athens envy. But because the public is a fiction, does not mean that it is only a fiction; as Lippmann saw, largely in spite of himself, fictions are robust realities as well.

Indeed, the public is often a special effect within media practices, designed to reassure us of the multitudes of fellow viewers and auditors. In early radio history, for example, speakers before the microphone were unnerved by the lack of an audience. This was also true of audiences, used to sharing their listening experience with compatriots. According to a public speaking text of 1928, a sense of the simultaneous audience was still rare on radio: "There is no mass-psychology on the part of the audience. The listeners are not aware of each other, get no support or stimulus from each other. Each one is listening alone" (Clapp & Kane 1928, 410). But this generalisation certainly did not hold for the mid 1930s. Cantril and Allport (1935) noted how broadcasters used what they called "social facilitation" to inculcate a sense of shared thought and feeling among a dispersed audience. Devices meant to give signs of a live assembly included studio audiences, sound effects (cheers, applause, clapping, canned laughter), practices such as "man in the street" interviews, genres of audience participation such as quiz shows, contestants called "at random" from the studio audience, contests, fan clubs, fan mail, promotional give-aways, telephone call-ins, direct address in radio talk, simulated interaction, and of course, applied research on the audience (ratings). Social science could be reflexively ploughed back into radio material; Welles' *War of the Worlds* script even inserted a faked Crossley rating of the evening's listening audience into the narrative (Cantril 1940/1982, 5). The radio listener was hailed not as a lonely individual adrift among wayward signals (the position of the amateur or DX-er), but as rubbing elbows with other listeners. Such authenticating details, or "audience effects" as one might call them, were calculated to give listeners of a feeling membership in a larger imagined community (Peters 1996).

The radio audience was both a fact of power and an effect of representation, which is also the precise fate of the public. Of extreme importance for the market and state, the audience of commercial broadcasting was generally designed to experience itself as a diaspora of simultaneous intimacies. As both Brecht and Adorno argued, the cosiness of radio listening was not a natural fact but an ideological achievement that covered over both exploitation and the utopian potentials for public organisation of the new medium. Mass communication — however unilateral, centralised, or imper-

sonal in structure — was engineered to not be experienced in those ways. The public represented to itself forms of public!

The Reflexive Public

Ever since the public succeeded the king as the synecdoche for the body politic, it has been mixed up with representation, but twentieth-century mediations on the fertility of the mediated sign, thanks to their exaggerations, allow us to recognise it more acutely. Lippmann called the public a phantom in the 1920s, and by the 1930s, commercial broadcasters had found ways to call up the spirit of the public as an audible effect in radio material. From these two cases, it is clear that what is most unique about the public in our century is its reflexive quality, its strange compound of live people and artifice, demographic variables and fictions, real opinions and spun news reports. Even in several recent lines of research in social science on public opinion the public is treated more or less frankly as an effect of representation, as I argue elsewhere (Peters 1995).

Finally, the public is subject to all the same anxieties as the "other" in twentieth-century communication theory more generally. Dewey (1927, 117) put it well: "If a public exists, it is surely as uncertain about its own whereabouts as philosophers since Hume have been about the residence and make-up of the self." Whether figured as the masses, the great unwashed, the great audience invisible, the silent majority, the implosion of the social, the people, a demographic segment, or a phantom from the other side, the public partakes of all the chief issues of communication in twentieth-century life: simulation, mediation, distance, self-reflexivity, and representation. It may enrich our debates and our inquiry to recognise that the lineage of these concerns go back at least to the eighteenth-century newsletter, with its combination of public printed knowledge and personal scribblings, or even to the king's body, with its mortal humanness on the one hand and metaphysical standing on the other. All representation involves the claim to transport a body across space or time, to bring to presence something invisible or inaudible; the phantoms that haunt the public are the phantoms that haunt communication itself.

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